PAGES ON ART

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BY

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'THE PRADO AND ITS MASTERPIECES.'
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DE LA PAGE IMPRIMÉE.'

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PREFACE

My acknowledgments are due to the editors of *The Burlington Magazine* and *The Morning Post* for permission to reprint the articles which have appeared in their pages. In defence of the reissue of such occasional writing the author would urge that he has had some practice in painting, sculpture and stage decoration, and that the articles on the East are by an old lover and collector of its art: this is said as an excuse for their presentation in book form. To those who will probably miss the literary gift I would say, like Delacroix, 'La plume n'est pas mon outil.'

Charles Ricketts.

October 2, 1912.

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CHARLES CONDER

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Le ciel si pâle et les arbres si grêles
Semblent sourire à nos costumes clairs
Qui vont flottant légers avec des airs
De nonchalance et des mouvements d'ailes.

PAUL VERLAINE.

WITH the death of Charles Conder, one of the most exquisite personalities in modern art has become lost to English painting. The rare possession of singular gifts, a marked personal control in the use of them, made the appreciation of his work less easy to contemporary criticism than it is now, when suddenly it falls into focus as if it belonged to the past. To the few and constant admirers of his pictures while he was a contributor to contemporary exhibitions, something rare and remote seemed characteristic of them, as if an artist long since dead had returned again from beyond the border-land where all time is one, to move musically in an enchanted isolation along for-

gotten ways, lulled by the memories of old songs and the echo of the laughter of witty adventures; his art evokes all the pathos and glitter of pleasure which is timeless, like beauty itself which knows no age.

Fromentin has stated that the secret of fine painting is to 'render the invisible.' Few artists attempt to-day to conjure up by association, and by an expressive use of their medium, that something which is not the mere statement of the visible. With Conder the alchemy by which impressions and moods become symbols of an unique train of thought was always at his command; and, since nothing beautiful and welcome in human endeavour is without ascendancy in the best of our experience, which we call 'the art of the past,' I would compare him with painters who have anticipated or counselled his efforts, and explain his affinity with them, which is in itself acceptable; and in what way he is dissimilar, for in the difference resides an even rarer acquisition to our experience and delight.

The immortal Watteau stands foremost among the conjurers of 'a desirable life.' No

artist has excelled him in endowing what might seem an occasional view of it with that rarity of perception which transmutes fact and fiction alike into the most precious of realities. Not forgetting Tiepolo, Watteau remains 'the great poet of the eighteenth century.' The poetic spirit took refuge with him away from the poets of his time. In the canvases of two or three eighteenth-century painters, and in the works of some musicians, we find the dawn of Romanticism, which has become the great achievement of the art and literature of the nineteenth century. Watteau bequeathed to his period not a message which his century could understand, but only his manner, and the music of Gluck and Mozart became lost for a while in the sound of the hungry tramp of the Revolution.

I would not insist upon a comparison between the master and the modern. At two points only does their art come into touch : both are idyllic painters, both are colourists ; but in temper they are dissimilar. Some of Watteau's mastery had to pass through the facile hands of Fragonard and became coloured by a more

worldly vision; the glamour of the *Fêtes Galantes* had to be morselled up in the fantastic art of Monticelli before the convention could be taken up by Conder, who brought to it something different, something at once more explicit yet more moody also, more capricious and more complex, in which the spirit of Verlaine's *Fêtes Galantes* is rendered into terms of painting, and the abstract little festival figures of Monticelli have become remoulded by a modern mind which blends irony with pleasure, which is gay, witty and alert, yet convinced that youth and even power pass like a summer in our experience, in which beauty alone has the power to endure.

The *Fêtes Galantes* of Paul Verlaine have seemed to many a transposition into verse of Watteau's paintings; as a matter of fact, they express a different mood—they are more ingenious, more conscious and less candid. The point of view of the friendly men who gave titles to some of Watteau's paintings, such as 'La Lorgneuse and Le Flûteur,' has been chosen as a point of departure, and next to such dainty poems as 'L'Allée,' 'La Grotte' and 'Cortège,' etc., the

most piquant designs of Watteau become mere abstractions in which beauty alone need be considered.

> Le soir tombait, un soir équivoque d'automne :
> Les belles, se pendant rêveuses à nos bras,
> Dirent alors des mots si spécieux, tout bas,
> Que notre âme depuis ce temps tremble et s'étonne.

These marvellous lines transcend—or shall we say 'traduce'?—Watteau's programme. The witty word-magician evokes the pathos and the bloom of autumn, which was the painter's season, but the laughter of Heine breaks through the mists, or some old terminal Faun (who remembers Ovid) has whispered into the ear of the poet vague half-hints as well as broken music, and his poems have become epigrams set to an accompaniment of viol and flute.

The influence of Fragonard counts in the development of Conder's painting, but not Fragonard's laughter; this was too Gallic, too easy, and it has passed away. His influence is less constant than that of Gabriel de Saint-Aubin. The example of that 'great-little master' was only technical; it affected Conder's drawing, which English critics find difficult to under-

stand. The rest of his art is modern, and was possible only at the time in which it appeared. Whistler and the print-makers of Japan had discovered the use of certain delicate transitions of tint. Beardsley, working on a hint caught from Whistler's peacock room, had developed what I would call cloud-ornament—that is, pattern deprived of its stem and drifting in showers of spangles, clusters of feathers and puffs of blossom. Conder's influence directed the course of Beardsley's career towards the interpretation of 'Modernity,' but the curious lace-like traceries and clouds of patches of the draughtsman gathered round the edges of the painter's fans, to assume, however, an aspect of petals and falling pearls in lieu of the crescents and thistle-down shapes used—I had almost said embroidered—by Beardsley.

I would hasten on to the essential quality in Conder's work, in which he will stand the severest tests, and challenge comparison with the sunniest aspects of painting. Conder was a colourist of astonishing range and invention; this gift usurps in his work the premier place. Monticelli sacrificed coherence for the

sake of colour, but his painting was also based on the contrast of light and shade, and in the use of both he sometimes lapses into over-emphasis. There is often a certain banality in his colour, tawny golds, ruby, peacock blues, bright scarlets and cheap pinks. With Conder the tones are at times almost hueless, like the gleams in water or upon old faded silks, and, dare I say so, on some modern tissues and fabrics in whose beauty we perceive the truth of Rodin's statement, that 'modern dress is yet a living art.'

In his silk paintings Conder discovered a new medium: his fans will some day be considered classics. Those of Watteau glimmer like a mirage of the memory, but they are nothing else; the master was not himself when he did them; should one be found, it would merely reflect the methods of Berain and Gillot. Great artists have chosen fan shapes to paint on. Degas and Manet have even done pastels in this form, but their works are in a sense occasional—they correspond to the use of the circle and the oval for a picture. A fan by Conder is different; it is often more

occasional, if you will, but the design melts into the texture of the surface, the medallions, spangles and lace-like borders tend towards the actual details of a dress. One of his fans does well enough in a frame; its true value becomes manifest when it is mounted and so becomes a living ornament or accessory of dress, revealing in its countless harmonies of colour and inventions of detail much which might well be studied by some *couturier* of the future. The 'Conder dress,' the 'Conder pattern' may some day become a mode, just as Madame de Pompadour put in fashion 'le déshabillé Watteau'; for it is not generally realised that, with the exception of some chance pictures, Watteau created his dresses; his contemporaries wore the periwigs and hoops of Hogarth; he does not even reflect the stage fashions of his time, but more often the modes affected by Vandyck and Veronese recast and refashioned.

I have met somewhere with the clever statement that the painters of the eighteenth century did not paint nature, *i.e.* trees and distances, but something very like them. This

definition is of wider application, and we may admit that nature is still uncaptured—that great art consciously, and little art with pedantic literalness and self-satisfied effort, have not succeeded in painting nature but 'something very like it.' Beyond question, the wish to render only the choicest appearances, not facts, was deliberate with Conder, whose place is in the realms of fancy, whose sense of life tended ever towards that which is desirable and rare. I have tried not to call his paintings fantastic or poetic—both terms would be excessive. A Frenchman would at once use the right word and call them *féerique*.

It has been said that Watteau created a visionary world, that he did not paint women but 'woman,' whilst Fragonard merely represented the soubrette. What stage has Conder chosen or created, and what of his women? Delightful swards and sunny bays, and, above, the motion of summer skies are seen through a tangle of garlands. A drift of petals gathers upon the skirts of his women like moths about a light. Some water festival or pageant of dress is being held at the court of Titania or

some other Sultana of Fairyland, who is bent on adventure and change. All the fairy godmothers who have nursed Prince Charming are here to dance; later they will bathe at a neighbouring pool, and feign that Actæon is hiding in a thicket. Soon it will be time to don disguise again and go to the Venice of Byron and Alfred de Musset, to bask in the limelight of passion and singe their wings at Bengal flames, or they will call at the house of Mademoiselle de Maupin, now married, alas!

Conder's women are not timeless, they have forgotten their age; but this, like beauty, is often a mere matter of opinion! We shall find their histories on the stage of Beaumarchais: they have passed into the realms of immortality not in the painting of Watteau but in the melodies of Mozart. They are 'The Countess,' Susanna, Donna Elvira; all are anxious to pardon—they are peeping at the moving pageant, for Don Juan was seen but a moment since. But what can have detained Donna Anna? It is so late, the 'Queen of the Night' has sung her great aria, the air is close—there are too many roses!

CHARLES CONDER

Walter Pater has written to the effect that, in moments of play, we often realise the expression of our happiest powers, and become the richer by perceptions which are denied to our more strenuous moments. To whose work could this justification of pleasure be better applied than to the festival art of Charles Conder? The proof will be found in his delicate fan paintings, for these surpass in number and importance his few oil pictures, in which we admire, however, the same love of colour and perception of a 'privileged life.' Occasionally his oil pictures purpose to be direct transcripts from actuality. A cloud of opal foam breaking on a floor of ivory is called 'The Esplanade at Brighton'; an amethyst sky above a tropical sapphire sea purposes to represent 'Dornoch,' which is a northern place where strawberries 'may sometimes be eaten in August.' Most of these works are so charming that we regret their rarity, yet they do not yield all that enchants us in his many fans, silk paintings and decorations. Several of the latter are considerable in size, really decorations, and, what is more, delightful in colour, design, and in

the sense of wit and romance which they evoke, the sense of luxury which they express, and the love for beautiful things that pass away, like laughter and music, the mirage of noon, the magic of the night, the perfume of flowers, and youth, and life.

II

CHARLES SHANNON

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'*L'Art et les Artistes.*'—*February* 1910.

DEUX artistes portent ce nom, l'un peintre des élégances mondaines, l'autre, peu connu dans son pays ; c'est du dernier, Charles Shannon, qu'il s'agit dans cet article.

Le charme d'une technique élégante et robuste, un sentiment du réel, mais choisi, d'où la part du rêve n'est pas exclue, voilà, en quelques mots, les données de la peinture de cet artiste, ou du moins un résumé de ce qu'il a ajouté a l'ensemble de l'école anglaise actuelle, dont la technique courante se ressent trop souvent des hasards d'une éducation mixte et de rencontre.

De tous ses contemporains, il est le seul qui se rattache, pour la technique du moins, à la tradition dont Reynolds fut le fondateur et Watts, en quelque sorte, l'émule ; influence à laquelle la peinture anglaise a dû un charme robuste dans le passé, mais qui s'atténue, se

tamise et se teinte d'une tonalité délicate avec Shannon, où Reynolds était abondant et magistral, d'une élégance pensive, où Watts était grave et splendide, et d'un charme contemplatif et quasi-nostalgique qui lui est propre, dont l'accent ne se rencontre nulle part dans la peinture contemporaine, mais qui s'apparente aux recherches de certains musiciens modernes vers une formule à la fois plus expressive et exigeante, où les beautés du style doivent s'allier à un sentiment intime mais plus restreint de l'expression personnelle. La peinture de Charles Shannon est donc à la fois très rare et très réactionnaire. Elle est réfractaire à toute emphase réaliste, à toute tendance vers les instantanés d'actualité et de mode ; ses tableaux s'effacent aux expositions générales, mais s'enveloppent de mystère et de charme parmi des œuvres de choix ; sa facture se plie à des exigences de tenue qui excluent les surprises de la peinture bâclée dont raffolent les hommes de lettres et la critique d'aujourd'hui.

Pour bien peindre, le tout n'est pas de posséder l'aisance d'une facture rapide ou nouvelle. Bien peindre, c'est bien voir, bien penser et

bien dire. Depuis l'idéal académique qui était pauvre et prévu, n'y a-t-il pas eu une tendance vers l'académisme du banal et, après la fatigue des rythmes trop connus, la haine du rythme, de l'harmonie, et l'oubli d'une chose précieuse devenue surannée, la composition, sans laquelle toute peinture reste à l'état d'étude ou d'esquisse ? Oserais-je dire, sans porter préjudice au jeune maître, que la mise en pages de ses œuvres en fait le charme principal, la seule chose peut-être qui s'impose dans la cohue criarde d'une exposition générale.

Une entente nouvelle des masses colorées et tonales, des silhouettes et des arabesques de la ligne distingue l'œuvre de Shannon de celui de ses glorieux devanciers de l'école anglaise, bien qu'il leur soit redevable de l'entente de la technique de son métier. Sa formule picturale est compacte, presque trapue ; il se plaît aux cadres carrés ou en cercles, chers aux maîtres toscans ; il ne se sert jamais des fonds meublés et presque tapageurs du grand Reynolds et de son école, ni des fonds touffus et fuyants chers à Watts. Dans ses tableaux, la pyramide classique se tronque, se brise en deux, le centre

de la toile se vide et les figures font cadre ; les fonds sombres des vieux maîtres deviennent lumineux, tandis que la figure principale se découpe, sobre de tons, sur le gris fauve d'un mur, ou se détache en clair sur le bleu d'une mer qui s'empourpre, brûlée par les feux d'un soleil lourd. La tonalité de ses toiles est sourde ; de la tenue sobre et presque sombre de ses portraits se dégage un attrait puissant ; le modelé se voile d'une brume colorante qui rappelle l'enveloppe mystérieuse de cet alchimiste merveilleux que fut Ricard. L'exemple de Whistler me revient ; sa facture fut pourtant d'un procédé différent, son idéal et sa mise en pages tout autres, la matière, dans quelques-unes de ses toiles, est plus légère, plus fragile, d'un effet plus arbitraire et plus abstrait, se rattachant à la peinture de Velazquez, vue comme à travers une gaze, tandis que la peinture de Shannon montre l'influence des portraitistes vénitiens et retient quelque chose de leur tenue, à la fois très sobre et très riche.

Grâce au goût éclairé de M. Bénédite une des toiles les plus typiques de Shannon vient d'être acquise par le Musée du Luxembourg ;

c'est le portrait sombre et presque sévère d'une jeune artiste, Mrs. Scott. Elle se tient en tenue d'atelier, ses mains, de forme presque ouvrière, touchent à la terre glaise d'une maquette inachevée ; beaucoup d'ombre, une lumière qui s'éteint sur le ton fauve du mur, sur des blancs presque gris et sur le noir riche de la robe. La tête aux yeux voilés, aux regards lointains, à l'expression vague et persistante, se détache sur les tons glauques d'un miroir où se reflète le profil pensif de la jeune et charmante femme, morceau d'une distinction rare, presque le sujet du tableau même, où se concentre tout le savoir d'une technique aux surfaces mystérieuses, où les glacis et les frottis habillent un ton ou une couleur d'une buée fragile, où la pâte se revêt de charme et de mystère. Dans ce tableau, on pressent, on soupçonne l'étude du beau savoir qui fait de la matière même des chefs-d'œuvre des maîtres une substance rare et exquise, étude qui sépare l'œuvre de Charles Shannon de toute influence impressionniste ou quasi-impressionniste, et qui justifie une comparaison osée avec ce maître inégal mais quelquefois

incomparable que fut Ricard. Si vous comparez cet œuvre aux peintures à la mode, aux procédés clairs 'tout de franchise' de ces milliers de peintres dont la facture ensoleillée fait toute l'originalité, la peinture de Shannon n'est guère originale ; sa personnalité se plaît aux résultats contraires, son originalité consiste à ne s'occuper d'aucune mode courante. Au travail d'un métier sobre, il joint la préoccupation d'un idéal tout d'intimité et de retraite. L'amour du luxe et de la richesse décorative se corrige chez lui par une réticence qui se ressent de la fréquentation des maîtres austères du passé. La surprise et l'admiration qu'exprimèrent à ses débuts Legros et Whistler s'expliquent par des qualités d'un ordre inattendu ; sa peinture est à la fois simple d'intention, mais d'un travail dont la technique s'est raffinée et compliquée, où la part du mieux n'est pas exclue. Du noir, du brun, du gris, un rose cendré, un blanc argentin, un bleu intense et comme teinté de turquoise ou de pourpre, voilà le registre de sa palette ; une silhouette simple et d'un effet immédiat, voilà l'essentiel de sa composition.

Plus de relief que n'en montre Whistler, moins de relief que chez les Vénitiens, bien moins encore que chez Reynolds ou Watts ; des lueurs pâles, des ombres mordorées ou glauques, voilà sa tonalité où il ne ressemble ni à Whistler aux effets fuyants, ni à Watts qui reste sculptural, ni à Ricard dont le métier exquis et l'expression psychique font tout le fond, et la composition presque rien.

Le bagage artistique de Shannon se résume en quelques portraits, d'un attrait sévère et d'un charme quasi-triste, en quelques tableaux de décoration où l'on pressent l'influence néo-païenne de l'école vénitienne, mais compliquée par ce sentiment de volupté mélancolique qui colore toute la poésie de Keats et toute la peinture anglaise soi-disant pré-raphaélite et néo-pré-raphaélite, dont le charme complexe intrigue l'esprit français, toujours ouvert aux sensations rares et nouvelles, curieux et incrédule, mais hostile au fond à tout ce qui se contredit ou se complique. Il faut entendre cette tendance poétique que j'ai signalée chez Shannon avec une nuance et presque une réticence ; de sens

dramatique et de symbolique, rien, moins encore que dans les toiles voluptueuses des Vénitiens ; rien de ce qui fait le charme compliqué des compositions de Burne-Jones, qu'on commence à retrouver après quelques années d'oubli et d'indifférence. La poétique de Shannon, si l'on me permet une phrase surannée, est d'une essence qui échappe à l'analyse ; cela se ressent d'un état d'esprit sensitif et recueilli plus que d'une vision intense ou inquiète. Sa poésie est plutôt idyllique que lyrique ; l'analyse en est même dangereuse, tandis que le résumé d'un portrait se limite à des faits dont l'explication est facile. Tel portrait de femme charmante, comme celui de Mrs. Dowdall, se résume dans une pose révélatrice, dans le rendu d'un regard pénétrant, dont la persistance se voile et vous poursuit. Tout l'effet du tableau se résume dans le rendu de l'ivoire des chairs, le ton fauve de la chevelure, le gris de la robe aux plis cassants, aux reflets d'acier. Le beau portrait de la comédienne, Miss MacCarthy, est plus compliqué d'éléments inattendus, puisque l'emphase théâtrale de la grande robe à l'infante y joue

une part de parade qui est étrangère aux tendances habituelles du peintre. La robe à ramages d'argent sur des soies d'un rose riche se détache en clair sur les plis lourds d'un rideau somptueux ; les lèvres ironiques de l'actrice se plissent dans un sourire froid ; la face est maquillée du fard traditionnel qu'accentue davantage le noir d'un voile semé de larmes d'argent, voile de deuil ou fantaisie de femme qu'exige le rôle de Doña Anna dans la comédie étincelante de *Don Juan aux enfers*, de Bernard Shaw.

Ce tableau, le seul peut-être auquel le public anglais fit quelque attention, grâce à la renommée de l'actrice, date de la même époque que le portrait acquis pour le Musée du Luxembourg. Il se rattache à un autre portrait fantastique que Shannon exposa au Salon, le portrait de Mrs. Scott, en robe du second Empire, œuvre d'un charme piquant et d'un effet inattendu. Ici le déguisement de la robe à crinoline surannée et charmante compte pour beaucoup ; les volants de gaze sur une trame légère voilent les tons de nacre d'une jupe de satin ; la tête s'appuie, légère et distraite,

dans une pose de paresse, sur une main gantée de gris. Un bouquet s'étale de fleurs chères à l'époque de la reine Victoria, volubilis d'un bleu de Sèvres, roses d'un ton de rubans de campagne, fuchsias et géraniums, fleurs touchantes de jardin de douairière dont l'éclat voyant et bref ajoute une note de force à l'harmonie éteinte de l'ensemble, tout en tons de rose passé et d'or sourd, comme estompé par une lumière qui se teinte d'un reflet d'eau dormante d'un de ces miroirs anciens où les lueurs se brisent, dont l'étain semble oublier l'image immédiate du présent pour en retenir un souvenir seulement, comme d'une chose ancienne et lointaine.

La technique de Shannon, comme le travail de sa pensée, est peu en dehors, peu entendue du public et, à coup sûr, peu goûtée de la critique anglaise. Faut-il en parler ? Y a-t-il aucun avantage à en faire l'analyse ? Ne vaut-il pas mieux en subir l'attrait ? Question que je n'ose vraiment résoudre. Pourtant l'on doit se rendre compte que, dans sa façon de peindre comme dans sa façon de sentir et de voir, il y a comme une différence, une protesta-

tion contre les tendances modernes. Bien des maîtres d'une valeur indiscutable se sont cachés pendant l'évolution mystérieuse ou difficile de leurs œuvres, Reynolds et Watts en Angleterre, en France, Chardin, pour ne pas citer l'immortel Watteau ; Prudhon et Ricard s'occupaient de procédés anciens. Pour ces maîtres d'un métier exquis, une touche, un ton, une couleur, ne fut jamais d'un rendu spontané, comme dans le métier franc et sans arrière-pensée, non pas de Velazquez, qu'on cite à tort, mais de Franz Hals dont le travail s'impose d'une façon immédiate.

Ne se trompe-t-on pas en attribuant un effet magique et légendaire aux vernis anciens, en leur attribuant l'émail, la pâte cristalline, les ombres transparentes qu'on trouve chez les grands maîtres, et au seul fait des huiles devenues précieuses par le temps, tout le mystère de la peinture ancienne ? Nous avons le mot du Titien : ' La chair ne se peint pas *alla prima*.' Nous avons des œuvres de Reynolds et de Prudhon où les procédés se sont fourvoyés, où les glacis coloriants se sont volatilisés, où seuls les fonds grisâtres restent comme le témoi-

gnage d'un essai mal venu. La pratique de Shannon se base sur des études spéciales ; il se restreint aux couleurs minérales, impérissables, dont tout cadmium, toute laque, toute couleur végétale et fugitive est exclue. Sa peinture est solide dans sa pâte, émaillée dans sa surface ; les ombres se fondent sous des glacis et des frottis qui ajoutent au mystère de sa peinture, qui en diminuent l'éclat peut-être, mais non le précieux.

Se figure-t-on l'aspect d'une œuvre ancienne dans une exposition d'aujourd'hui, ou d'une œuvre moderne, même excellente, parmi les toiles d'un musée ? Se rend-on compte de tout ce qui disparaîtrait chez l'une comme chez l'autre, de l'abîme qui sépare les habitudes techniques de quatre siècles de découvertes, des tentatives expérimentales de notre temps ? Tel gris, tel rose, tel vert, d'un maître, Chardin par exemple, où les trouver dans une œuvre récente ? Les lueurs dorées et transparentes, les ombres légères des maîtres anciens, où faut-il les chercher dans la facture immédiate qu'on appelle maintenant un beau métier ?

Me permettra-t-on de citer les premières œuvres d'un artiste de haute valeur, Fantin-Latour, où la tonalité riche et légère est tout imprégnée des procédés anciens, et les dernières, à la tonalité claire, dont la couleur est froide, le travail mince et sans ' cuisine,' expression fâcheuse qui flétrit toute la pratique de tels cuisiniers du passé, Rembrandt et Titien par exemple. L'éclat des chairs chez Titien et Rubens, le mystère des ombres chez Corrège et Rembrandt, la moiteur des regards chez Ricard, tout le mystérieux et l'émail des surfaces des chefs-d'œuvres ne peut se rendre avec une délicatesse égale que par des procédés dont la formule reste cachée à la plupart des artistes et surtout aux écrivains d'art. Une étude consciente de cette partie importante de la peinture compte énormément dans l'effort de Charles Shannon. L'espace me manque pour parler de son travail de graveur sur bois et de ses lithographies savoureuses où l'on retrouvera souvent les premières pensées de ses tableaux, les mêmes recherches d'une composition inattendue, quelque chose du même usage du plain et des vides, une facture riche,

un peu heurtée, et d'un dessin dont le trait est bien le trait d'un coloriste, se servant d'une ligne ou d'un frottis de crayon pour exprimer une couleur ou une valeur. Le trait rapide de ses lithographies reste toujours le trait d'un peintre, très souple, peu correct et très expressif.

Shannon a quarante-quatre ans ; travailleur acharné, se dérobant pour peindre, sa vie s'est passée sans événement. Pendant sept ans, depuis ses débuts, il n'exposa nulle part. Anxieux et nerveux au travail, achevant ses tableaux et ses portraits loin du modèle, il manque de tout ce qui fait foule autour d'un portraitiste à succès. Ses toiles se trouvent aux musées de Paris, de Venise, de Munich, de quelques villes allemandes ; aucun musée anglais n'en est orné.[1] Il est de sang irlandais, d'éducation toute anglaise. Comme bien des peintres de race, il est collectionneur, ouvert à bien des admirations inattendues, goûtant la peinture de ses confrères pour des raisons qui n'ont souvent rien d'objectif. On le sent distrait où d'autres sont attentifs ; peu sen-

[1] Since this was written one of his pictures is at Manchester.

sible aux louanges, qui d'ailleurs lui sont rares ; c'est un contemplatif qu'on dirait de passage, un rêveur doublé d'un travailleur qui ne s'émeut qu'aux exigences de son métier et devant l'idéal de son art.

III

A NOTE ON THE ART OF WATTEAU

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I WAS once asked why I had never written on the art of Watteau. I explained, to do so would be to challenge comparison with the De Goncourts. Why not translate their book?—It cannot be translated! Yet, the idea remained, haunting and persistent, why not try? I tried and failed. In the following pages the influence of their work will be felt upon one who is also a lover of the master of idyllic painting. I do not wish to palliate the fact, but to state the case.

'Watteau is the great, the only poet of the eighteenth century. He has revealed to us an unexplored kingdom in the world of the imagination, and gilded it by his temper and manner of approach.' To retain something of the faculty of self-abstraction from reality of the

child at play is the secret of the artist : the fixed attention of a child upon a charming part of reality is also the privilege of the poet and the lover, but the power to bring our experience into new and delightful relation belongs only to the poet and the painter. To the lover of contemplation, to the man who would nurse his mood and toy with his melancholy, Watteau has brought his pictures which are devoted to the expression of an enchanted isolation and repose ; his is the power to conjure us away to places beyond our time or his, where we can saunter in idyllic woods and in the delicate gardens of old palaces of art where reality has become entranced.

What is the spell by which he compels our attention ? What is his secret of success ? His gift, his secret, is the sense of grace. With Watteau grace is unrelated to mere facts of physical beauty ; it has become a spiritual element added to form itself, evanescent as the ripple upon water, intangible as the movement in the sky ; it is as a cadence in the rendering of movement and gesture which would seem suspended as it were by a sense of rhythm. In

the rendering of this he owes nothing to any of the great masters of the past.

To his festivals and scenes of an enchanted life Watteau has invited the creatures of romance and holiday. The denizens of the world of old comedies break into the glades with their songs and laughter, and flaunt their humour by the quiet of the pools. All of them are here; Célimene and Silvia, and the magician Harlequin who will do wonders with his wand and fascinate us behind his masque; here is Pierrot, all in white, in the livery of the moon, moon-struck, awe-struck, solitary and astonished. Epicureans of folly and the votarists of opportunity, each brings the flash of silk and satin dresses to outrival the sunset. Here the children of Romance are at truce with the creatures of Comedy, and share with them their sudden 'entrances' and 'exits' upon this theatre of an enchanted life! They lean to listen to the wit and pathos of their loves; they charm each other by the turn of a face which remembers, or by the touch of a passing hand. We, the spectators, watch the movement of long dialogues and

witty 'asides' whilst a rose sheds its latest petals at the base of some broken pedestal; and beyond—beyond the lake, we hear the echoes of Oberon's horn in the stillness of the ripening woods.

The liveries and fashions of old comedies have yielded a choice among all their follies of fashion and colour—silver, ivory and rose, the flash of the topaz and the aquamarine, the gleam of the amethyst, the dull heat of amber, each lends its radiance to the stuffs out of which he crumples out a skirt or shapes a bodice.

Let us turn to the triumphs of his brush, to 'L'Embarquement pour Cythère,' to 'L'Assemblée sur une Terrasse,' where the crimsons have an added touch of flame; or let us turn to another phase of his manner, to 'Iris c'est de Bonheur . . .,' or 'L'Amour paisible,' where we shall find pallid blues caught from autumn skies, the tones of the tourmaline, the spark-like radiance of the topaz, and those strange colours to which the eighteenth century gave such curious names — 'Gorge de Pigeon,' 'Cuisse de Nymphe émue,' 'Eau dormante.'

We shall find this memory for rare tints only in Watteau's paintings. His invention in dress influenced his time: besides the négligé adopted later by Madame de Pompadour, there is hardly a trick of fashion in the pictures of other eighteenth-century masters which he did not invent: the toques and ruffs of Fragonard, the mantillas worn in the Figaro of Beaumarchais were his invention, and first appeared in the chance figure of 'Le Bal' and the 'Divertissment Champêtre.' He did not find them in his own time, which still moved in the hoops and periwigs of *le grand siècle*, or who were clothed as Hogarth has clothed his courtesans and fops.

Did 'Actuality' or reality ever affect him even in his early military paintings? The De Goncourts have confessed that Watteau was 'the most charming and sincere teller of half-truths'; even his military pieces and encampments are seen from the point of view of a child watching the soldiers from behind a garden wall. His armies are, in fact, always on a happy return march.

Watteau is the painter-poet of leisure, the

lover of heartsease, of peace and tranquillity where contentment counts for most. His is the pastoral mood which loves to dwell in the sun and listen to the ripening hours counted by the pulses of a brook. Watteau is a painter of 'L'Amour paisible' and 'Les Charmes de la Vie.' The horizon of his world is limited by the margin of an enchanted sea, against which a gilded boat lingers and beckons with its prow. Time rests and loiters, and refuses to depart, lulled by the cadences of the fountains and the waterfalls. The eyes of his revellers are lit by a gleam of pleasure or a spark of flame; upon a cheek springs the flush of desire; upon their lips thoughts, quick and winged, pause and vanish in a smile and look; for love, nothing but love, is the ruling spirit of this place, but love tranquil and in contemplation, secure in its triumph and languid in its very fervour. Here hand meets hand in the friendly resistance of consent, 'and lips only deny that which the eyes have promised.' Watteau is the interpreter of moods which come with the ripening of humanity, in the aftermath of its emotions, languor, gallantry and reverie,

wherein passion has become touched by melancholy and a sense of nostalgia.

A vague and languid harmony murmurs in an undertone beneath the wit and fancy of his painting; we feel that his actors must vanish with the sunset, and the lute, which Viola or Silvia touched but now, forget its music. A sense of melancholy and musical regret is present in all his *fêtes galantes*, the inner man shows himself in his work, and the pathos of a premature death seems hinted at in the very eagerness for pleasure of this consumptive man, grasping at beauty with all the eagerness of one doomed to live but a little. We remember the fervour and clairvoyance of Keats enchanting his melancholy with the ring of the word 'farewell' or brooding over the musk and velvet of a rose. Watteau himself breaks into his work solitary yet alert, and tradition has pointed him out in several chance figures in his designs. He has painted himself the negligent spectator of his love-makers, the abstracted listener to the music which he hardly notes, dumb, silent and listless to the serenades; inattentive, indifferent, deaf as the instrument

to its own music, tired of the singer and of the song ! Millet noted the melancholy in Watteau's delicate little people ; he imagined that, after the great apotheosis of ' L'Embarquement pour Cythère,' all would be put back like puppets into their box. This criticism is hostile, yet just in part ; it comes, however, from a man who valued the elegance of life mainly as the stamp of a period of refinement for which he had little love, and which had gone.

If we imagine Watteau's canvases emptied of their figures, what would remain ? We should still possess one of the most notable landscape-painters the world has seen, one who stands in invention midway between the rich pastoral paintings of Rubens and the idylls of Corot. At times even the conception of the landscape runs counter to the temper of the figures, and dominates by its stillness and shadows the character of the design, as it does in ' La Perspective,' for instance, that beautiful painting of a monumental avenue about which the vivacious actors are dotted as if in a movement to depart.

The De Goncourts were the first to state

that the originality and character of Watteau's landscape had not yet been fully realised. His sense of nature is less idealistic and fantastic in its circumstances than in the spirit which had recast the composing elements. The tufts of fan-shaped tree, the avenues of slim tree-trunks, or the fountains and waterfalls, may be seen in many old gardens. The touch of the magician lies in his management of light and movement, in the gleams among the avenues, the shifting shadows on the grass, the vistas of sky and water between the boughs, in the infinite variety of his gleaming distances in which he places a single fountain-like tree, or the movement of a gliding crowd transfigured by the sun. Note the haze upon haze at the horizon beyond a lake with its enchanted island, or the sky flecked with island-like clouds. The landscape is an essential element in the poetry of his work; when he has discarded it we are conscious of something lacking, even in such exquisite pictures as 'L'Enseigne de Gersaint' and 'L'Occupation selon l'Age.' Close in the vista in 'Le Bal,' replace it by a wall or curtain, and the scene would lose some of its magic

and the figures seem cramped and dwarfed. Watteau has given to his landscapes an emotional element that transcends the glitter and sparkle of his revellers, who are 'creatures of the moment.'

The lingering on and on of summer into the autumn, this is his season. The aftermath of light in the sky and among the tree-tops, the truce between daylight and sunset, this is his hour. The distances are dim and blue, mist floats across the trees and gives to them that dank and fantastic aspect we see in the autumn only, when the sky has been brilliant but a moment before and the light lingers yet, a presence half-felt, half-seen among the top-most leaves. The mists gather apace, soon the light will wax pale and the grass dun, and the day slip past; only the solitary statue, bending near a pool, will remain to beckon and listen, for the revellers must soon be gone—gone back to the haunts of long-forgotten things; gone like Oberon and his fairy court; gone, never to again return!

IV

A CENTURY OF ART

1810-1910

A CENTURY OF ART

Preface to a catalogue and series of notes on some pictures exhibited at the Grafton Galleries, 1911.

BETWEEN the years 1810-1910, which have been chosen to limit the scope of this Exhibition, lies more than a century of continuous effort to renew the language of painting and to find for it the acceptance which in former centuries had been achieved by a closer contact between art and the business of life as it was then. If former centuries might be described as eras of Church and State patronage, the nineteenth century is that of isolated and unsupported effort. For this we shall find only a partial parallel in Holland during the seventeenth century, in so far that the little Dutch masters and the moderns have been forced into a direct appeal to the private purchaser, and to the creating of a fashion or appetite for the kind of art which

each artist wished to do. The past might therefore be described as the epoch of programme-painting, whilst our period might be termed the period of competitive painting, *i.e.* competition to secure attention against other artists, other aims, and other schools. The art of Holland lasted about seventy years; modern painting has flourished in England and France for over a hundred. A common bond in training and temper made of the little Dutch masters a guild of allied craftsmen; with the exception of Rembrandt, they are of one cast, almost all of one temper, and might belong to one guild or family. No such common bond unites, in the two countries under discussion, the many schools which have flourished during the nineteenth century, nor is there such monotony of range and aim in England or in France. Competition or public exhibition has led to different results. At first sight one might even say that in modern times there has been a loss of the acquired or traditional accomplishment so noticeable in Holland, and a loss in continuity of aim, did not a closer study reveal a constant return to certain ideals,

and the fruitful feud between realism under many disguises and idealism under many names, or, to put it briefly, the struggle between observation put into immediate terms of painting and experience translated into terms of art.

Two major aims have moved art ever since its beginning, namely, the wish to conquer facts for their own sake or to express that which lies behind fact. Sometimes the latest effort has been directed into technical channels, sometimes a mere fashion in subject-matter and art has been Classical or Romantic in its objective. Viewed at a distance, all can be reduced to a more or less direct appeal to the eye or memory, and a love for simple or more complex emotions. Beyond all this one quality counts for most, namely, the essential quality of the artistic temper of the painter. It is the player himself who counts, not the rules of the game he chances to play; the quality of his intellect and skill, for no fool has ever yet painted a masterpiece. In this the art of the nineteenth century lags behind no other epoch. The battle has been waged between the chief

opponents in the artistic game, not with the laggards, and most of the master players have been brought here together—most, not all—grouped within their epoch and country. Both French and English painting emerge out of the ordeal not with one school, like Holland, but with several; not with one aim, but many, each with its separate character, like the schools of Italy. The nineteenth century has not been an epoch of transition like the eighteenth; it is a new Renaissance; it is full of the conquest of old kingdoms and the foundation of new ones; it is an epoch of hope and endeavour among the artists at least, for it has been a period when the world had no palaces for its great painters to decorate, no deeds it cared to trust to its great sculptors; the public has favoured only the men who resembled it, and bidden the artist make bricks without straw for a livelihood. The modern mind has had little hope, less trust, and no belief in art; it has hugged other ideals. Fortunately the artists have not wavered or lost courage, and we can turn to pictures upon these walls which could hold their own in the

National Gallery, and upon drawings and bronzes which it were difficult to outclass.

It is a common belief that the development of landscape-painting has been the chief achievement of the last hundred years. This is so far true in that no other epoch has equalled it in the constant effort and success achieved in that direction. But success in a line of endeavour which Delacroix declared to be the minor art of a specialist, does not include the whole achievement of the century. We can point to masterpieces in other fields where greater æsthetic and passionate forces are at play. If we can say no painter has surpassed Turner in technical skill, we can say also no sculptor has surpassed Rodin in emotional range. Turner's faculties of invention were immense, but as a designer of landscape he is surpassed by Hokusai, his contemporary, who was also a great figure draughtsman. There is an unfailing charm in all the work of Corot, a delicate temperance and tenderness, but each of these qualities pass into a higher level of expression, a deeper range of feeling, in the work of Puvis de Chavannes. In every field

of observation, in the quality of character behind the work, there have been masters in the nineteenth century, men of volcanic force like Hokusai, Goya and Turner, of profound feeling like Millet and Rodin, poets and visionaries like Blake, Delacroix and Rossetti; whole movements have been devoted to the search after beauty, beauty of fact, beauty of emotion and thought, and to the revaluation of the scope of art as the emotional equal of the great literature of our time. The vistas opened up to the world by the great musicians have their counterpart in the poetic painters of the century, in Delacroix for instance, and in the soaring art of G. F. Watts. There is the pre-Raphaelite movement in England, which can be compared in its significance to that outlook upon Nature and Romance which was realised in the poetry of Keats and in the music of Schubert. There have been artists who have ventured to compete with the great Italians in the study of form, whose art moves to a rhythm, such as Ingres and Alfred Stevens, and craftsmen and experimentalists without number working in self-

imposed fields of research and along curious byways of endeavour, such as the great caricaturist Daumier, some book-illustrators, and the Impressionists.

Too much of the history of modern painting has been devoted to the battle against the Academic movement in France. Classicism was a reaction within the eighteenth century itself ; it has left fine specimens of architecture, but its influence upon painting is on the whole insignificant if one realises that Goya was the contemporary of David, and that Classicism has never affected the development of English painting. Of this transitory fashion of a time and place there is practically nothing in this Exhibition. Yet a wholesale condemnation of this school leads to a disregard of the personality of the artist that may be exquisite, rare, or even great within the rules of a game in which we are not for the moment interested. Ingres as a painter is absent here, though well represented as a draughtsman. This is to be regretted ; his absence was unavoidable. Chassériau counts among the French Classicists, and Paul Baudry also. Chifflart has been

included. Let me hasten to add that if these artists, together with Gustave Moreau, form a group apart, only partly interrelated, their position is on the outer edge of Classicism; each was exigent in the scholarly quality of his workmanship; each was touched by the splendour of Classic art; each was endowed also with an essential and precious quality of 'personality,' and this counts for most.

The reader must consider these notes solely in the light of personal observations. The author's opinions are often not of the latest; perhaps few critics have thought, in noting the lacunæ of this Exhibition, of the forgotten names I have mentioned—that of Baudry, for instance. Other masters are also absent, but their rare works have often passed unobserved in current exhibitions of the International Society. The narrow margin of that which can yet be borrowed from collectors diminishes daily, and many priceless works here shown will never be brought together again. This is why these desultory notes have been written.

V

PUVIS DE CHAVANNES

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To François Monod.

FEW personalities in the art of the nineteenth century afford such a scope for study and speculation as Puvis de Chavannes. If we accept Taine's aphorism that art is the result of an environment, how shall we account for the work of this man who dealt in quintessences and abstractions in a period devoted to the noting of detail and incident? Yet, if we allow Mr. Huysmans's angry contradiction of Taine's theory, and consider art as a revolt from its environment, we are hardly nearer a solution of the problem, since the work of Puvis de Chavannes is lacking in the element of revolt and impatience which has often characterised the painting of his century. It is probable that Taine is nearer the truth than is Huysmans; neither theory, however, is sufficient to account for the creative impulse in

man which would seem to follow a course known only to itself, in which the environment may count in so far that it can thwart or destroy, just as an accident may put an end to a precious life : yet a noble and stimulating environment may fail to bring about its reflection in art or be badly served by it. This was the case with the first Empire, while the ignoble reaction accompanying the Restoration was the signal for the Romantic upheaval ; thus, in a period devoted mainly to the transaction of small affairs, in a period without the desire for epical art—without the need of churches and palaces—we witness the work of Puvis de Chavannes, who strove for the noblest tasks, and who would have been equal to satisfying the cravings of some genial tyrant or pope desirous of seeing the history of the world painted in his palace within his lifetime.

The moment has not yet come in which to view the case of Puvis de Chavannes from sufficient distance to establish a plausible theory for his tendencies : in a sense he is less comprehensible than some earlier masters —that is, less easy to class. He is more difficult

than Delacroix, who is now comfortably placed in galleries devoted to the old masters : he is still more removed from most of us than is Courbet, to whom we owe the impulse still obtaining in naturalism and its descendant, impressionism. True, we can class together a few facts which may serve to explain Puvis's technical origin ; we can trace the germ of his early manner in a few experimental paintings by Chassériau (when still under the partial influence of Ingres) and so back to Poussin. This plausible explanation might satisfy a Frenchman ; it accounts for something in his early method of drawing, for something in his sense of gesture ; in these things he can be placed in a sequent but not unbroken line of French masters. Yet to all this we must add the new spirit pervading even his earliest works, which is not Roman as with Poussin, not neo-Greek as with Ingres, nor Ionian and exotic as with Chassériau. To the efforts of these great artists towards a plastic and poetic synthesis Puvis de Chavannes has added a more racy sense of the French soil, a more human and comprehensive vision, and in the

construction, method and aspect of his paintings he has brought a mass of new qualities which rank him among the great designers in the history of art.

It is often stated that the nineteenth century has seen a new conquest over Nature in the art of landscape-painting: to some it would seem that the field of artistic expression has thus been almost indefinitely enlarged; to others, more sceptical, there would seem to be a danger in this apparent escape from control and the substitution of the mood of a man (out of doors) for that more complex expression of life and experience which is the field of the figure painter. The fact is too often overlooked that the greater includes the lesser art, and that landscape-painting has been discovered, and its essential conventions invented by figure painters.

Let us rule out, for convenience, the pale aerial backgrounds of Piero della Francesca, the dewy distances of Memling, and other unsurpassable, if subordinate, renderings of ground and sky by the masters of the fifteenth century, and accept the major fact that the

modern conception of landscape-painting was invented by Titian. The essentials of landscape, namely, the undulating structure of the ground, the rooting and branching of trees, the broken illumination of distances and the study of afternoon clouds, owe their discovery to him: these beautiful things represent the stock-in-trade of nearly all subsequent landscape-painting. Rubens will add more movement and glitter, Turner and Constable even more, yet the pattern remains almost unaltered, namely, the undulating foreground, the large and small balancing masses of trees and the rolling vista beyond. The composing masses are more varied with Rubens, with Turner they are often more formal (nearer to the architecture of the theatre vista). With Corot, in his larger works, the pattern is still traditional—a denuded bough cuts across the two balancing tree masses, and the distant water in the backgrounds of Titian has become the gleam of a lake. With each master the pigment tends to a more broken surface, and the colour undergoes a drastic modification, but in some degree the same romantic climaxes in

Nature are chosen, and the scene flooded with broken lights and shadows. Watteau, one of the greatest landscape-painters, anticipates something of the melancholy grace which characterises the art of Corot; but in all these masters, including even Constable, Titian's plume-like trees have remained. Corot escapes from them only in a few chance studies from Nature—in the rendering of the willows and poplars of the north of France. I would admit that in the chronology of landscape-painting the modification of the Titian formula has been considerable, without, however, breaking with the mould. The change in the use of pigment has been enormous, ranging from shapely, controlled brushwork to a convention in which the touch is shapeless, as with Constable. The scale of tonality has gone from gold to silver, from amber to ashes; it has ranged from sunset to dawn, but always within the same pictorial scheme, in which the spectator stands some distance from the scene as if viewing it through a window.

With Nicolas Poussin, though his indebtedness to Titian would seem enormous, we have

one of the greatest architects of landscape, the equal of Titian in the construction of the ground, and the superior of Rubens and Turner in this particular, the inferior to all three in his rendering of light and air. I believe that this constructive element in Poussin counts for something in the evolution of landscape achieved by Puvis de Chavannes.

I am aware that a totally new view of Nature, owing almost nothing to Titian, will be traced among chance studies of road and windswept canals drawn by Rembrandt;[1] but these were unknown even to Millet and Puvis, and they have therefore had no actual influence on the evolution of landscape-painting. We prize one or two pictures by that delightful but unequal little master, John Crome, for a hint at this more intimate or humble outlook upon Nature which belonged to Rembrandt.

If the influence of Constable's experimental workmanship upon modern painting has been enormous, it can hardly be said that he brought a great change to the designing of landscape. His larger pictures are, after all, fine academic

[1] These are preserved mainly in the Chatsworth collection.

set pieces in which the trees are viewed as mid-distance masses. In his sketches there is a more original outlook, something hinting at the simplicity of motive which characterises the colour prints of Japan, without equalling them, however, in range of subject and variety of illumination.

Millet has shown a greater originality in the designing of landscape with his finely constructed ground and wand-like trees ; he avoids the climax effects of the professional landscape-painter, or, at any rate, the rendering of them with the large orchestral (musical festival) effects of Turner or the persistent tremolo of the fiddles (with a touch of the triangle), which allures us in Corot, even when these masters are monotonous and even academic, in the sense that they reflect a combination of admittedly beautiful or agreeable things. Against this tendency which I have just described as academic I have nothing to say, since all art in some degree is little else, whether the artist selects that which he thinks capable of beautiful interpretation or else combines elements of beauty from afar ; the term academic becomes

a reproach when the choice is easy to foresee, when the combination lures a conventional public on the side of the artist, just as the Palladian palaces and arriving ship, the pleasant sweep of the bay and the fineness of the day flattered the contemporaries of Claude in favour of his porcelain skies and zinc seas : such gentle ' cheateries ' masquerade themselves in strange ways—the string of geese in a sketch by Daubigny, the little red cow in a picture by Corot, are agreeable rustic touches which add incalculable hundreds to a picture in the eyes of the Philistine and the dealer.

I shall doubtless be accused of undervaluing the study of light which most of these masters have brought to landscape-painting ; but an exclusive attention to this form of study is, in itself, hardly more valuable than the conquest of exaggerated relief which was the aim of the Tenebrosi, and if this fashion in the pictorial output of the seventeenth century stifled the art of painting and poisoned the colour sense of a whole period, the landscape-painters' rendering of the glitter of sunlight and sunset has disintegrated the plastic sense of many

modern painters, narrowed their outlook, and established a convention in the conduct of pigment which is unsuited to the expression of form, and so affected the standard of figure painting ; at any rate it has become a common fashion hardly more valuable than the light animated manner affected by Ricci and Piazzetta, who reacted in Italy against the cellar light of the Tenebrosi.

The most original designer of landscape since Rembrandt is Puvis de Chavannes. With him the character of the ground, the drawing of the horizon, have varied more than with any other painter. With him we escape once for all from the beautiful tree convention established by Titian and modified by Corot, in which they are seen as feathery masses in the mid-distance. With Puvis the distant wand-like trees of Millet have become the colonnades of tree trunks which we find in the north of France. His trees are recognisable as poplar, willow or sycamore, etc. ; the leaves are no longer the gold or silver feathery masses of Titian, Turner, Constable and Corot, but a strange pattern against the sky, or else sober

masses of varying contour supported by varying branch forms ; the tree trunks have become grey, green or white, and beyond extend horizons and skies that are not the great summer skies of Titian, the sirocco clouds of Tiepolo, the Bengal lights of Turner's fantastic sunsets, nor the splashes of mauve and silver of Corot, but skies that have their hour, like the evening hush of the turquoise sky in ' Le Repos,' the dry light of morning in the ' Ludus pro Patria,' the weight of noon in ' La Vision Antique,' or the mauve of a summer night over the stubble fields in ' Le Sommeil.'

Puvis de Chavannes has rendered the countless moods belonging to the seasons over land and sea, in the dawn, noon and twilight ; and do not let us forget that these moments are not caught in mere racy sketches and studies ; they do not owe sparkle and charm to freshness of pigment or to some chaotic experimentalism in handling ; these effects form part in a noble scheme in which man has not been banished out of Nature (to be replaced by the temper of the artist), but in which he figures in the eternally engrossing drama of work and

repose, effort or thought, under the spell of passion, tenderness and meditation; in movements of effort and moods of compassion; clothed not merely with the perfection of the various ages and sexes but viewed in his proper significance as worker or dreamer, like those god-like workmen and mothers of 'Le Travail' and 'Le Repos'; or like the dreamers and creatures of infinite tenderness and foresight painted as the 'Sainte Geneviève veillant sur Paris' or 'Virgil listening to the Bees'; or else we have those women transfigured by tenderness and charm of the 'Doux Pays' or 'La Toilette,' in which we shall find expressed, with a primæval candour of vision and emotion, that mood of woman-worship which we find steeped in languor and ritual in the art of Rossetti, or steeped in a 'tenderer' sensuality with Giorgione and other poet-painters to whom beauty has been revealed as a force upon which rested the destinies of a generation. For, like all great masters, besides the moods in which his art is stimulating as a tonic, and beyond the possibilities of the common man, Puvis de Chavannes paints also those moods of ecstasy

in which we find the love of beauty and ease and grace which have also their power of consolation. He has moods of playfulness, in which he records the strange, quaint, sudden movements of children, as in the 'Doux Pays' and 'La Pêche.' He has moments of gaiety and fascination, as in the 'Jeunes Filles au bord de la Mer.' He expresses ecstasy in the figure of the mediæval painter in 'L'Inspiration Chrétienne' and in the 'St. John.'

The first time I saw Puvis de Chavannes was in the Louvre. He was standing in front of that admirable antique sometimes called a Sea Deity, sometimes Alexander the Great; in the crowding or herding out of the visitors leaving the gallery I saw him again, one of the last to leave, before 'Le Déluge' by Poussin. The works he was studying help to explain the trend of his partialities. I called upon him two years later with a friend, like myself then a youth of twenty, and, looking back across the years, I remember him as the man of his work, simple, grave and genial, touched and charmed by our raw and uncultivated admiration for his painting. He had just finished his

first pastel, a later phase of his practice in which he has passed into the collections of tardy purchasers. He confessed to being still the owner of all his smaller pictures, for criticism does not allow a variety of range to a man, and 'the painter who paints large must not paint small.' From time to time his speech became admonitory, and he launched forth into disapproval of current tendencies—the photographic drawing of many, 'la perfection bête qui n'a rien à faire avec le vrai dessin, le dessin expressif! and against 'les pochades d'atelier et de vacance.' I remember the insistence with which he underlined the fact that the cartoon for the Sorbonne was but the skeleton of the design without the colour scheme which would transform it; and, as a matter of fact, this vast allegory would seem to have won a huge popular suffrage owing to the enchanting contrast between the sky and the dark semicircle of trees closing in this new Parnassus of the arts and sciences.

I would now consider some details of his method wherein he resembles certain other masters, or else reacts against their tendencies.

For years the character of his drawing counted as an element of unpopularity and misconception. In a period in which drawing had dwindled into more or less careful copying—when artists, in fact, could not work without the presence of a model—his preoccupation with the finding of a kind of drawing which would express the major saliences and characteristics and yet form part of the design of the whole picture, his study of accented and rhythmic construction, was incomprehensible and offensive. I do not know if the accusation that Puvis de Chavannes could not draw led to a further accenting of his tendencies, and so reduced some of his later figures almost to symbols; it is more probable that some other preoccupation intervened, such as a greater lightness of tone which may deprive the painter of the illusion of relief. In the earlier designs at Amiens the human form is rendered with a great insistence upon largeness of construction and relief—that is, upon the plastic quality of form. The colour scheme of the four earlier works is still in a sense conventional: they have the effect of noble tapestries; there is a survival of an

influence caught from the decorative works of Chassériau. This applies also to the aspect of 'La Pêche,' which is contemporary with 'Le Travail,' and those splendid sanguine studies now for the most part in the Luxembourg. The sense of form, however, is more massive than with Chassériau and more naturalistic: this gives way in the seventies and eighties to a massive simplicity in which no thought of Chassériau is possible. From the first, Puvis de Chavannes possessed a monumental sense of landscape unsuspected by his forerunner.

The climax of the master's method was reached in the first series executed for the Pantheon and in the 'Ludus pro Patria.' Between these works we can place the 'Doux Pays' and the 'Pauvre Pêcheur.' These masterpieces can challenge comparison with the works of any master done at any period; in them the classical or Olympian mood of the earlier designs has given way to one more human, more genial, more racy and more original. The last ten years of the master's life saw a further simplification in his method

of drawing, and an ever-increasing lightness of tonality. This change was at first distasteful to the French public, which in the eighties was enamoured of the ball dresses and top hats of Gervex, then at their newest, and with the photographic realism prevalent in the Salon. The amber light and astonishingly musical ambience in 'Le Bois Sacré' won suffrages from all Paris, however, to whom, for the moment, this work appealed quite suddenly. In the Salon it produced the effect of some Greek fragment lost in an upholstered drawing-room with the velvet poufs and pink lampshades then in vogue. In later life what I have termed the musical ambience usurps the place to some extent of the human interest which had belonged to the works executed in the seventies and early eighties. In the Boston decorations little else survives, though in centrality of conception and design the last decorations in the Pantheon, left unfinished at his death, are not inferior to the first ; but in these, as in the Sorbonne and Hôtel de Ville decorations, the scheme is perhaps ever so slightly on that side which has rendered him

acceptable to the lovers of latter-day impressionism and symbolism, as if he had no talent but only a very personal manner. Perhaps in these last works the sense of form has become too abstract. The colour sense has followed a line of development towards a greater aerial quality till it has become little more than the blues of the sky and shadows of France.

The art of Puvis which had been classical and robust under the lyrical impulse of Chassériau, more normal and more emotional in his maturity, melts in its last phase into a lyrical and musical mood. The masculine interest in the Worker and Thinker gives place to the charm of the Muse and the Ministrant: the classical women of the 'Doux Pays' become the aerial girls of the Boston decoration; the racy human types, at one time so French in character, give way to the nymphs with astonished eyes of 'L'Automne,' the æsthetic girls and youths of the Rouen decorations, and the superbly conceived but abstract types of 'L'Hiver.'

Where did Puvis learn the aerial tonality of the major portion of his works? In the four

early decorations at Amiens the prevalent tone is that of some noble and naturalistic fresco by some master who had seen 'Les Bouviers' by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Riccardi chapel, and the 'Death of Adam' by Piero della Francesca: there is in them a classical influence also that is difficult to analyse, which is different from that which inspired Chassériau, whose mural decorations show the pervading influence of certain Pompeian frescoes, such as the 'Medea,' the superb 'Hercules and Telephus,' and the 'Hercules and Omphale' at Naples, one of which had been copied by Ingres.

The grey and blue and green general tonality in Puvis's work increases with the simplification of his method. The general aspect of his designs has been compared to Piero della Francesca, but, if this influence reacted upon him years after he had visited Italy, the resemblance is of the slightest to those who know the radiant and steady silver light in which Piero has bathed the subjects of his frescoes. I incline to suggesting an almost inexplicable influence caught from the chance works of

Corot to account for the evolution of this profoundly original phase of painting, which, like other original efforts, was partly instinctive, then conscious, and then strongly willed. Behind him lay the fact that the great fresco painters—Giotto, Angelico, Piero della Francesca and Michelangelo — had painted in a paler key than other designers who had been less successful in mural decoration, and that these frescoes brought light and colour to the buildings. Chassériau and Manet each brought back the rumour of the blonde paintings of Italy, and we have two fashions in art to help in strengthening this tendency : on the one hand, the growing love for the fifteenth-century painters, and on the other impressionism, which strove to break with the exigencies and traditional practices of oil-painting. The will of his time was turned towards the practice of a lighter scheme of painting, and the artifices of chiaroscuro or the expressive quality of relief became distasteful. This tendency was doubtless fostered in part by the discovery of the art of Japan : in this movement towards lightness Puvis de Chavannes took the lead.

I have striven to describe Puvis's discoveries in landscape, his originality and variety in the conception and design of his work, and his enormous range of vision. The space at my disposal does not allow me to describe the curiously fortunate and quite original balance of interest which he has established between the environment of land and sky and the human interest in his paintings, for which there is hardly any absolute precedent in the art of the past. I have striven to explain his noble qualities as a draughtsman of monumental figures, and the range of his emotions, which make him acceptable to the more balanced lover of realism and to the student of Greek art (they need not necessarily be at variance). I have striven to hint at the musical and harmonious scale of colour which supports or, more properly, forms an integral part of his designs. Technically he strove for a method which tended towards fresco effects that are new in oil-painting. In this transposition of the effect of one medium into another, which had its reason in the durability of the oiled medium used as decoration, we may detect a

limitation in aim which after all was self-imposed. It is probable that certain great beauties we admire in the racy conduct of pigment and the love of what is called 'quality,' were of little interest to him, at any rate, they were unnecessary to his purpose as a decorator: yet certain easel works show this preoccupation, such as 'L'Espérance' and 'L'Enfant Prodigue.' The most beautiful of all his pictures, 'Le Pauvre Pêcheur,' if it dispenses with subtleties of surface, produces an effect of remote beauty as of a work by a strange unknown master of some distant clime and period.

The love of quality in pigment or brush-work was not in the scheme of this painter of mural decorations, whose smaller canvases charm one like some little fresco detached from the walls of some non-existent Herculaneum, buried in the imagination of a man who had at once the painter's vision and the direct sense of emotional appeal of the poet.

The master's range of subject was foreign to two generations of contemporary painters who were striving to specialise themselves:

the dignity and singleness of his art and aim exasperated two generations of critics, who missed the opportunity for self-important pronouncements or admonition. The vestrymen and placemen who governed the art politics of his time gave him walls to decorate, as often as not as an afterthought: these decorations cost the artist on an average £200 each.

Two cities in Europe outside France possess important pictures of his, Dresden and Dublin. He is still comparatively unknown in England; but the present artistic temper of this country is still, for the moment, under the Salon and mixed Paris atelier ideals, against which Puvis de Chavannes had to contend throughout his life.

Postscript.

Since this was written we have heard a great deal about decoration and decorative art. I take it that what is too poor to be called art can now be called decoration.

VI

AUGUSTE RODIN

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Auguste Rodin, l'Œuvre et l'Homme. Par Judith Cladel.

THE reissue of Judith Cladel's work on Rodin affords the opportunity of praising a book of rare value and charm upon the latest of those great artists who have enriched the nineteenth century, so fortunate, at least as far as France is concerned, in noble masterpieces of sculpture. Biographies on artists are usually written after their death, and either they are coloured by the mechanical praises of the habitual writer on art, or else the gospel is written by the man with a grievance 'who knew the master well'! France affects the first type of biographer, whose praises have the florid colourlessness of the funeral wreath; in England we favour the second, who, with his bailiff's sense of being in at a failure, encourages us in the national belief that 'the good is not so good after all.' To a feminine patience in

matters of detail, Mademoiselle Cladel has added that woman's sense for the moods in man, the result being vital and vivid, not small and feminine. Her book contains pictures of the moments and events in the life of a great artist ; it is rich in that apprehension of the psychological influence of time and place which is to be found only in French literature. Delightful passages of autobiography are used as a setting or introduction to the portrait of Rodin—glimpses of the sculptor's days surrounded by his works and duties, or in moments of reaction common to all creative intellects. These are followed by invaluable transcriptions of actual conversations—I had almost said monologues—in which we come close to the inner life of the artist.

The few biographical details of Rodin's youth have often been written about : they shed but a little light upon the future man ; they may be summed up in a few words—poverty, uncongenial tasks, fruitless efforts. Who has not heard that ' L'Homme au Nez cassé ' was rejected from the Salon, or of the famous scandal which surrounded the exhibition of ' L'Age d'Airain ' ?

This book, however, adds to our information on the matter. We learn that the commission appointed by the State, which included Paul de Saint-Victor and Charles Yriarte (at times a delightful writer), delivered a judgment which did not entirely exonerate the artist, and once again we find the most enlightened critics, like the Church in the past, unable or unwilling to stop the axe or the rack, whichever happened to be popular at the moment. The tragedy—or is it the comedy ?—of all criticism lies in this inability to rise beyond the range of current fashions or the gossip of the anonymous studios. Paul Dubois's energetic defence of Rodin, which rallied the sculptors of the jury, is now too well known to need recapitulation ; it counts among the achievements of an artist of distinction and a man of culture.

The story of the statue of Balzac is told tactfully by one in sympathy with the aims of the sculptor. But, charming and fresh as the book proves to be in its form and substance, one's attention remains captured by the long *causeries* upon sculpture and architecture in which we have the record of the words of Rodin

himself. I would transcribe two sentences, taken at random, which will speak for the rest : 'No ; the persecution of artists characterises epochs of decadence ! . . . the love of art is an instinct which has become lost ; some day it may return like a river vanishing underground for a while to reappear again.' 'To-day the public is without nobility ; its character has become debased ; it gives no support to art—in thirty or forty years the end will have come.'

These judgments, with their cry of pessimism, have been constant with the masters of the nineteenth century. In his opinions, Rodin tends to overlook the immense importance of his work in our day, the glory it will shed upon our time, when it has ceased to be the present, has become respectable with age and romantic by the mere effect of distance. I would be the last to dispute the fact that, whatever demand for art there may be in the states and churches of to-day, it would seem to be filled by men who reflect the mediocrity of the average man distraught by an unthinking spread of suffrage and education. This evil in its present aspect may be transitory ! Where the

major man fails in his estimate of his own epoch is in the unconscious discounting of his own example and the value of his output, together with an exaggerated sense of the future prominence of that which passes away. Rodin's opinion is also coloured by what I would call 'the fallacy of retrospection,' in which the great masters of the past seem to appear with a frequency which vanishes on closer examination, and with a power for influence which has never been theirs. We forget that the Renaissance in Italy was the achievement of some fifty men at the most, working throughout three centuries. We forget that their importance seemed a negligible quantity in the actual business of their day; Michelangelo might have been executed by the returning Medici, and they would have incurred less blame than did the Athens of Pericles when Pheidias was sacrificed to a reactionary wave in politics after a period of forced prosperity.

In this book on Rodin we are enriched by many vivid impressions and wholesome thoughts on art; these are not always characteristic of the average writings upon Rodin, the greatest

of living artists. The illustrations are superb in their quality, and representative in their choice ; yet, among the plates, several of those singular and casual drawings, made by Rodin in recent years, have been included, which count, to me at least, not as the affirmation of the will to create, which is the impelling motive behind sculpture, but as the memoranda and jottings of a curious intellect, wandering in the borderland of the 'evanescent' ; in lieu of some of these I would gladly have welcomed some of those astonishing 'préparations' in which the artist has rendered impassioned gesture, of which he has the secret, in significant designs. These are now, for the most part I believe, in the possession of Monsieur Octave Mirbeau ; and for these posterity may forgive that unequal writer many of his opinions on art.

VII

FANTIN-LATOUR

FANTIN-LATOUR

BY the unexpected death of Fantin-Latour, France is deprived of one of her most exclusive and individual artists, and a link is broken that connects the present with the art movement in France which was first hailed by Baudelaire, and was destined to develop on the one hand into impressionism, on the other to break up into isolated personalities who were opposed to it and its catchwords, 'values,' 'division of tone,' 'open air,' and other casual and isolated subjects of inquiry. Among those 'personal' painters who have stood outside the pale of impressionism Degas and Whistler stand midway, Puvis de Chavannes stands beyond, Legros is in opposition, whilst Fantin stands apart.

The last Universal Exhibition in Paris brought together an extensive show of modern French masters; as an afterthought, a few important early works by Fantin were hung close to one

or two admirable canvases by Manet and the Impressionists. Next to Fantin's tranquil and sincere pictures the bright but monotonous studies of Claude Monet became at once wooden in touch and woolly in colour—the monotony of outlook and technique of the Impressionists afforded a triumph to pictures which had been made outside the now common experiments in 'light painting'; it strengthened the reputation of Manet's early work to the exclusion of his later painting, rehabilitated the almost forgotten art of Ricard, and drew attention to the equally forgotten early work of Legros. The acquisition of important portraits by Fantin for the museum of Berlin and for the Luxembourg has accentuated a fact of which many were conscious in France and elsewhere, that the art of Fantin had weathered the overwhelming gusts and squalls of 'modernity' and change which had seemed all-powerful.

From the earliest years of his career, Fantin has striven to see things harmoniously: a greater warmth of tone and raciness in the texture of his pigment alone differentiate the pictures he painted in the sixties from those

which he executed in his later years ; there is no change in outlook, but a development of method within a formula which is the same throughout in character ; the later pictures are merely cooler in tonality and more granular in surface.

His work can be divided into portraiture, still life and subject pieces ; his portraits are conceived in a mood of singular gravity, simplicity and charm—a homely and almost 'bourgeois' charm. His delightful studies of flowers and fruit are done not in imitation but in emulation of Chardin. From these two trends of study, based on a personal rendering of reality, he escapes at times into the fields of fancy, into radiant glades haunted by all the naiades and nymphs who once appeared in vision to Faust. This side of his art takes definite form in a superb series of lithographs, done ostensibly under the inspiration of the great romantic musicians, but in which their heroines — Astarte, Dido or Kundry — appear as the sisters of the Io and Antiope of Correggio. Something which lingers in the art of Prudhon and Corot glimmers in these

designs for the last time; they are the elegy or swan-song of romanticism. I repeat Fantin was himself from first to last, from the 'Salon of the rejected' to the latest and most orthodox of the salons.

With his 'Homage to Delacroix' (a picture which interested Rossetti and which Degas attempted to buy) he initiated a series of those portrait groups of which 'Manet and his Circle' in the Luxembourg is the best known (but not the most successful), and the 'Family Group,' exhibited at the last Universal Exhibition, the most typical and the most admirable. Some two or three portraits (of Madame Fantin, I believe), his portrait of Manet, his portrait group of Mr. and Mrs. Edwards, count among his masterpieces. His lithographs are more difficult to praise in detail; in their sequence they constitute one of the most important achievements in an art which has yielded the opportunity of masterpieces to Goya, Ingres, Delacroix, Daumier, Corot, Whistler, and in our own time to Charles Shannon.

VIII

THE WORK OF G. F. WATTS AT BURLINGTON HOUSE

THE WORK OF G. F. WATTS AT BURLINGTON HOUSE

THE nineteenth century has been a great art epoch, and among its greatest artists we have to place G. F. Watts; his work is sufficiently large in outlook, sufficient in the quality of personal discovery and invention to rank him with the great painters of all time. The nobility of his aim, and the dignity of his life have met with general recognition; it is therefore on the technical aspect of his work that I would say most, since the artist himself had a tendency to disclaim his powers with a modesty which the public, and the critics, have often taken too literally. Watts is a great technician, a master painter, a pioneer and experimentalist in his craft; he is in this matter the great event in England since Turner, and the most dignified painter since Reynolds. One can divide his painting into three phases,

and in each he is a master. His earlier works are traditional in method ; they are based on a pattern of chiaroscuro, or a rich warm substructure of tone, such as we praise in the great Venetian masters. Later his pictures are cooler and more varied in pitch ; they are also more plastic or more sculptural in aspect. In his latest manner he avoids over definition in relief and contour, and evokes an impression of things lit by a radiant light. If his first manner deals, like the Venetians, with light as it glows in the afternoon, or in a sunlit room ; if, in his second manner, the light has slipped past, leaving its quality of vibration in the cool grey spaces of neutral colour, in his later pictures the painter turns to face the very focus of the light ; the shadows have vanished, to be replaced by the contrasted colours and the interplay of tones, warm and cool, upon each other, at a pitch in which the light itself is white.

Constable attempted to convey the pulsations of light by a ruggedness of surface and by the juxtaposition of pure white and extreme dark in which subtleties of local colour, colour

transitions, and even form, were sacrificed to this dominant effort. With the Impressionists light has been sought by a more or less systematic use of contrasted and complementary tones in a tangle of touches intended to catch the light. In both methods form, and its appeal to the artist as a means of expression, has become of secondary importance.

With Watts, the initial scheme was too large and significant to lapse into the study of any single object of inquiry, and, besides his achievements as a colourist and painter, his study of form is of the greatest interest and significance. With him form was controlled by his preference for certain types which were of a large yet nervous cast; the eternal figures of the Parthenon were ever present to his mind as a standard for a certain breadth in the rendering of plane and mass.

Our great sculptor Alfred Stevens also used an ample and even more generalised type for his figures, yet, this type once achieved, we do not recognise that further study of the surfaces of the human body, such as Watts has given to the shoulders and neck of his 'Clytie' or

to his 'Psyche' for instance. In Watts's male portraits not only does he emphasise the variations of contour which make for character, but he exaggerates certain structural saliences and establishes the 'planes' like a sculptor.

The combination of plastic force with the study of the resources of contrasted and superimposed pigments, the study of illumination and harmony, have enabled him to dispense with the beautiful convention of a visible outline, which neither Veronese, Frans Hals, nor Courbet disdained to use. His method is also different from that of the man who tries to realise things solely by the calculation of tones upon objects actually before him, like Manet for instance; with the spread of impressionist methods painting has deliberately foregone some of the plastic force it had previously achieved.

I have heard that Watts was not always fortunate in the painting of women, that he was lacking in the sense of grace and charm. A superb picture, 'Bianca,' has been allowed as an exception, and the noble type of the sitter, the beautiful shoulders, the dignity and

beauty of the accessories, have afforded him opportunities for successful picture-making; but let us note also the beautiful rendering of the eyes, the latent tenderness in the rich contours of the chin and mouth, and above all the tender flesh painting. An earlier work, 'Lady Margaret Beaumont and Daughter,' in which a lady in Victorian dress turns to her little child half-hidden behind her skirt, is no less admirable. Let us study the varied painting of the silks and lace which a still-life painter might envy, the workmanship on the hands, the charming movement of the one which holds a handkerchief; we find such things only in the pictures of the greatest and most delicate painters, and only an artist can fully understand the difficulties which have been overcome in the masterly treatment of the profile which has the candour and fusion of new ivory. Both these works benefit by being pictures or designs, yet Watts can be equally successful in the narrowest of compasses and under the greatest pictorial restriction. There is the exquisite profile of Lady Lytton, with the 'warm' pallor of the cheeks, the delicate lids, the long suave

hair ; how often do we find these things done so perfectly ? These pictures belong to the early maturity and to the hey-day of the artist ; in each case there was the singular beauty of the sitter represented, yet, among the latest works, we shall find this delicacy of touch retained. Note in the small picture of Mrs. Watts the treatment of the brow and smooth, tight hair, the exquisite and tremulous qualities of expression. There is something in each of these canvases you will not readily match in the painting of the nineteenth century ; not of course in Courbet, who viewed a face only as the continuation or part of the neck ; not in the elegant and for the moment underrated portraits by Baudry. We shall find this power occasionally in Ingres, more often with Ricard. The method of Manet hardly allows for anything but a hint at the dominant charm or vivacity of a face ; he has left only one or two dainty sketches, and we shall find but a little more in most portraits by Whistler. Lawrence, with all his mastery, would seem tawdry—'tawdry, yet delicious'—and with Prudhon, who was a rare physiognomist, we practically come

in touch with the eighteenth century; so the contention that these portraits are almost unique in the painting of their century remains practically established.

Fromentin has said, 'L'art de peindre n'est que l'art d'exprimer l'invisible par le visible.' This is hardly a thought we should expect from the enthusiastic advocate of the lesser Dutchmen, though that exquisite writer's estimate of Rembrandt shows that the sentence was no mere literary flourish. I think every one allows Watts's success in this quality in some of his more noted portraits of men, of which we have admirable specimens in the early portrait of Tennyson, in the nervous intellectual portraits of Sir W. Bowman, or in the portrait of Burne-Jones. The invisible! the pulsations in the air about a spiritual manifestation, the peculiar rhythm belonging to 'Les gestes insolites,' the appeal to our emotions by some intuitive use of line, mass, tone, and colour, or expression,—this poetic, or emotional gift has been at the command of this master in many of his imaginative designs. There is the unexpressed image left on the

brain between the painted gesture and the one which preceded it or must follow it. Botticelli has this gift, Tintoretto often fails in this and remains declamatory; in this Delacroix rarely fails. The slow onward movement of the Death in 'Love and Death' belongs to this order of invention. Turn this figure into marble, and we would possess not only the finest statue in England, but the rival to Rodin's 'Birth of Adam.'

I would speak of less successful pictures, for I imagine that some of Watts's admirers would hardly consider the 'Hope, Faith, and Charity,' for instance, a technical success; yet it fascinates me greatly: to me there is an emotional quality in these intricately related figures, which I find only in the early work of Rossetti. Were we shown the strange feverish workmanship and drawing of this work in a subject towards which a 'new critic' might feel drawn by its implied triviality, 'Two Apples on a Table-Cloth,' for instance, or 'A Woman scratching her Back,' we should be assured that it was 'a transmutation of mere pigment into life itself.'

The title of the picture, 'A Life of unrewarded

Toil,' has something of the temper of the period in which Browning wrote 'Dog Tray'—a temper which has changed. This work was the subject of some respectful and even disrespectful pity at the time it was painted, but were the landscape signed J. F. Millet we would be told, and told rightly, 'that the picture expressed wonderfully the density of the ground, the tangle of the growths and hedge seen in their detail and mass.' I remember one of the veterans of impressionism, Camille Pissaro, praising the rare tone-qualities of the 'Ariadne,' which was attacked at the time of its production by our 'lions' and 'Daniels' of the newspapers and reviews.

I am aware that there is perhaps a lack of taste in my defence of such serious and permanent work against ephemeral criticism long since forgotten, even by its authors; yet, to-day is always rather like yesterday, and, do not let us disguise the fact, a certain contemporary hostility may force an artist into those very exaggerations and elaborations of methods and aim which some of these canvases display. Let us strive to understand fine work in its

essentials, not from one point only; let us not blame it for the absence of the very qualities it possesses. It is for this reason that I have underlined the quality in the master's workmanship and colour in pictures that have been deemed unsuccessful.

I can remember, if I may be pardoned the anecdote, one occasion when two friends were quarrelling over Watts's work in a room where I happened to be listening to M. Alphonse Legros; their voices became angry and loud, and I a restless and bad listener. One of the disputants turned to the veteran artist and asked, 'Do you not think the flesh colour in Watts's pictures is often cadaverous?' M. Legros answered, 'Je trouve que Watts a toujours la belle couleur qui convient à ses tableaux.' This answer in its range and purpose is untranslatable; it is quite final as criticism.

The show at the Academy is in every way representative, though it seems less so than the Exhibition held at the New Gallery some years ago; this benefited by many works now housed in the National Portrait Gallery and the Tate Gallery. Had the Academy been

able to include a selection from these pictures it would have been the richer by many masterpieces of pure painting, such as the 'Psyche,' the 'Portrait of the Artist,' the profound and subtle portrait of Martineau, and the superb portrait of William Morris, besides others hardly less admirable in workmanship and characterisation.

In the Diploma room of the Academy hangs one of the artist's finest imaginative designs, 'The Curse of Cain,' in which the pictorial scheme, the sense of gesture, and scale of colour are entirely his own ; yet it is a work characterised by something of that passionate awe and latent tenderness of the superhuman designer of the Sistine ceiling. This masterpiece was perhaps difficult or impossible to move ; it is little known. It may be said that it is only seen by foreigners, Baedeker in hand, intent upon the Leonardo cartoon and the bas-relief by Michaelangelo.

Manchester contributes one picture only, 'Prayer.' Birmingham has not sent the superb picture 'A Roman Lady,' which is one of the treasures of a singularly interesting provincial

gallery. One or two provincial towns have benefited by the gift of works which are not to be found here. From Oxford and Cambridge we have two works, but not the portrait of Dean Stanley—one of Watts's masterpieces, which, when I saw it last, had suffered from exposure to the sun in that singular provincial place the Bodleian Library; nor has Cambridge lent the gorgeous portrait of a former Duke of Devonshire possessed by the Fitzwilliam museum. I mention these absent works merely to show that, magnificent as this exhibition undoubtedly is, it does not exhaust all the possibilities of masterpieces by this great English master.

The Committee of the Academy has very wisely hung most of the works by period, but not entirely so. There were probably difficulties in the way of absolute consistency in this matter, and the tendency of the artist to revise early works in his possession points to the fact that he was aware of the strong intellectual bond of unity between his pictures belonging to the different periods of his career. The Academy has also done wisely in excluding

some quite juvenile specimens which furnished subject for hostile critical digressions when hung in the New Gallery exhibition; and frankly, if there are several works still in the possession of the trustees of the artist which one would like to see here, the portrait of Swinburne above all, there are only a few one would care to miss, and these are unimportant, and mostly early drawings in which Watts was at the time too young to be himself.

The first picture, in point of date, which commands admiration is the 'Portrait of Miss Mary Fox'; it is a beautifully designed, decorative portrait, which reminds one, in points of workmanship, like the 'Tennyson' and the 'Lady Margaret Beaumont,' of the tremulous painting of Ricard at his best; they each display a richer palette, a finer pictorial scheme than the Frenchman, and would be sufficient to make the reputation of an artist. Were a young painter to appear in a modern exhibition with works like these, his accomplishment, originality, and significance as a painter and artist would be recognised, perhaps a little grudgingly in England, but not so else-

where. We should hail in them, perhaps, an artist who was conscious of that something in the human face beyond vivacity and forcibleness, or literalness of rendering; a painter who could turn his pigment into something more than the stuff one squeezes out of tubes; in fact, the artist who in the words of Fromentin 'renders the invisible by the visible.' The workmanship in these works is rich, delicate, original; it anticipates the feverish delicacy of some of the latest pictures, but in a different pitch, and by a process of thin superimpositions of broken colour and thin glazes. The 'Dr. Joseph Joachim' has hardly a rival in the modern school; it is less traditional in scheme than 'The Man with the Leather Belt,' by Courbet; it is also a masterpiece, and I am not sure that in its conception it has a parallel in art; as a painting it is solid, rich, supple, yet mysterious.

We can naturally leave that reconstruction of the Arundel bust, 'The Wife of Pygmalion,' to the charming words of Mr. Swinburne; in temper it is related to several designs of 'Ariadne,' and to a 'Clytie,' seen against a superb

background of sunflowers, which ranks with the 'Psyche' and the 'Daphne' amongst the artist's masterpieces. To this happy vein in the master's work belongs an almost hueless 'Judgment of Paris,' which in its restricted scheme and size has some of the majestic sense of beauty of the former canvases; but we are within touch of that great period when Watts gives us his 'Love and Death' and other pictures, in which he remembers the Elgin marbles with their 'dense' rich planes, their rich contours, the steady, splendid sense of life and noble sense of movement—movement held in by some inner rhythm.

For some years onward his vein of pictorial invention remained at this level, while his technical power was beyond anything done in England since Lawrence painted 'The Cardinal' and 'The Pope,' and Turner his sensational 'Ulysses deriding Polyphemus.' I am here speaking only of painting, of mastery and control of the medium, not of those excursions made by other masters into the intricacy of modern psychology and emotion, where we shall find Rossetti and Burne-Jones—those

interpreters of passion as it hides away in the modern human mind, troubled, isolated, and coiled upon itself, and with whom passion and the love of beauty is no longer outward and expansive, but something which remembers and regrets.

I have purposely avoided any analysis of the individual poetic quality behind the work of Watts, simply because I have noticed a tendency amongst critics to be frightened by all delicacy or profundity of thought, and to like art in proportion to its kinship with still-life painting. To the refinements of execution required by refinement of feeling they prefer directness of method and a sort of art masonry. It is probably owing to the small amount of success of most moderns in the subtleties of the craft that we now talk so much about qualities of spontaneity and vivacity, forgetting the hesitations and alchemy of diluents and superimposed pigments and glazes in Rembrandt, and the explicit statement by Titian that 'flesh cannot be rendered *alla prima*.' The test of good painting is not the ease with which it is done, but its beautiful expressive quality.

Some of these noble pictures, which are still new to-day, were begun when Victorian art was in its 'puppy-dog period'; he was a stranger to the pre-Raphaelite movement. The pretty rusticities of Fred Walker, and of the 'Christmas Number epoch,' passed him by and have passed away. Since then a younger generation has tried to paint with a Parisian accent. All the while Watts has remained alone in English painting, and in the words of Stevens, the sculptor-painter, 'the only man who understands great art'; a solitary worker aiming, in his own words, at 'the utmost for the highest,' untouched by fashion, indifference, popularity, or esteem; as unaffected and studious in his life as he was generous and great as an artist, in contented possession of his 'practice' and his aim.

IX

CONSTANTIN MEUNIER

HIS AIM AND PLACE IN THE ART OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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THE art of Puvis de Chavannes, Rodin, and Constantin Meunier might be described as a renewal of the great traditions of the first half of the nineteenth century. These men have accepted greater responsibilities and faced greater issues than their contemporaries; theirs is a larger outlook upon art and life, for, if we turn to the work done in the seventies and eighties by other artists of the first and second rank, who at first sight might seem the most varied in aim, to Menzel and Manet for instance, or to Fortuny and Degas, we find the painting of detail and the matching of tones, the observation of tricks of character and movement, the anatomy of clothes, or the novelties of occasional effects, not the facing of larger issues. Their art expressed solely the

surface of things, the strangeness and glitter of life, seen with something of the mordant wit of a good journalism. The main tendency in the latter third, or even half, of the nineteenth century was a reaction against great art.[1] The aim of painting was to astonish or charm : in its tendency it had become 'genre,' crossed by the landscape painting habits of the man who travels in search of the picturesque. If the two major men, Courbet and Carpeaux, who form the link between the earlier and later art movements of the century, retained a certain dignity in method and handling ; if both remain in their gifts superior to their general aims, the more significant and passionate effort of earlier masters, such as Delacroix and Millet, had become a thing of the past. The greater tradition is renewed once more by Puvis de Chavannes in painting, by Rodin in sculpture, and in the work of the last comer, Constantin Meunier ; to each we owe a reconstruction of the plastic conventions ; they have rendered more synthetic and expressive the language of

[1] In this article the writer has not included England in his estimate of European tendencies.

art, and freed it from mental habits of the note-book and the mere vivacious transcript from nature. In the place of incidental facts, small verities of effect seen in the streets, the theatre, and the studio, we find once more the expression of the beauty of essential things, human effort, tenderness and meditation, work, pain and desire, and, above all, that essential sincerity of workmanship which frees art from the chance charms of the sketch, and the curiosities of the unattached intelligence.

Meunier's sculpture is on a level of effort with the great perpetual tradition which would remould facts and grasp essentials; his work is rhythmic in aspect, sober in detail, and noble in the rendering of relief and surface. If in his sympathy for daily life and action he reminds one of the temper in which sober mediæval craftsmen carved the Labours and the Months on Gothic cathedrals, in the control of his subject matter—man at work or at rest, stamped by the characteristics of his caste and habits of thought—he is also in a sense a classic sculptor.

Like many modern masters Meunier was

late in finding or controlling his medium of expression, and in freeing himself from contemporary influences. There was the inevitable insufficiency of his modern training, which had to be supplemented by long individual effort; there was the inevitable battle for existence (for the right to be an artist), and the waiting in patience for opportunity, in a period which has lost the traditional use for the arts.

Meunier started life as a painter, and to the last he would turn for change to his brushes and chalks. In these two mediums he is always interesting, if a little 'occasional' and experimental. The value of his pictures and pastels lies in a sort of austerity in the use of paints and chalks to render the gaunt silhouette of a worker, seen as it were in mid-distance, and the aspects of the land of the factory and mine. His experience as a painter in all probability counted in his faculty as a sculptor for remembering movement, and escaping from the conditions imposed upon the common craftsman who works from a posing model, conditions which make the sole standard of popular academic sculpture.

Meunier was over forty when he exhibited his statue 'Le Marteleur,' which remains on the whole his most typical work; but from this onward to the great gaunt ancestral 'workman' in the last salon there is a continuous possession of his craft, and an unswerving continuity of aim.

The major influence on Meunier, an influence of suggestion only, came from the paintings of Millet; to the peasant painter he owes the discovery of the plastic significance of the worker; to Millet he owes also the rediscovery of that beautiful convention which gives prominence to the major forms and ignores vivacious and trivial details. This had tended too often to be overlooked by modern artists in their love of what the French call 'le Morceau.'

In the evolution of Millet's practice we can trace the influence of the synthetic and 'leonine' drawing of Delacroix, and of Daumier, another imaginative and emphatic draughtsman. These two contemporary influences count in Millet's early work for an intenser element, which tends to disappear in his later drawings, which are less energetic, if always

solemn and austere; it is in the energetic figure of Millet's 'Sower' that we find the forerunner of many of Meunier's workmen. Yet if there is a certain kinship of aim between Millet and Meunier the mood of each remains different. Millet's work is placid and brooding in temper; he expresses all the gravity of work and the gravity of repose. Meunier interprets energy and concentration of purpose, both in action and in rest; his human type is not placid, but seared and steeled by effort. The brooding type created by Millet—man bent towards the ground—has given place to one in which the very muscles are massed on the brow by the effort of a constant will; the flesh is sparse, and the clothes have become almost abstract by their adaptation to active work—as if moulded by the sweat of the furnace and the mine.

Millet's bucolic temper brooded round a central woman-type; he painted by preference the woman who moulds the bread. Above all things he is the painter of maternity; in this he stands apart, even from the gravest and most ecstatic painters of the Madonna. This is his province in the history of art: this is his

individual discovery. With Meunier, though one of his latest works is the large decorative figure, 'La Maternité,' we find an active and virile habit of thought, in which woman hardly figures at all. Glance at his work; it expresses male energies as constantly (almost as exclusively) as Donatello; the enchanting little 'Hiercheuse,' one of his most popular statuettes, is an excursion into the exquisite and strange in form; with her mining breeches, her boyish gesture and face, she is almost sexless. The tragic woman in 'Le Grisou' is the 'ancestress,' the mother of sons; with sunken eyes and crumpled hands she expresses all the compassion of one who has borne and suffered, and who watches, with no word left, the wrecking of a life and the nothingness of hope and youth. The dominant motive of Meunier's work is a passionate and energetic patience. Many of his masterpieces, such as 'Le Marteleur,' 'Le Puddleur,' 'Le Lamineur,' 'Le Mineur au Travail,' impress one as typical figures, not as seen incidents; they are new in choice of subject, and memorable also for their simplicity and intensity in workmanship; his modelling

is large and square in plane, sober in the variations of the surfaces by which detail is indicated or withheld. A certain monotony of facial type should not blind us to his power of rendering variety of movement, variety in the structure of the human body, the torsos and the scale of the arms; variations which are stamped upon the human frame by different habits of work and life, not by mere dumb-bell exercise, which forms the standard of proportion to the art-student and the academic sculptor.

Single in aim, Meunier is never didactic or sentimental; his workers do not shake their fists at the cosmos. The sincerity and directness of his method is one with its dignity of purpose; hence that perfect good luck in the result which we art-lovers call style; hence the unity in works as divergent in mood as the 'Hiercheuse' and 'L'Homme Blessé,' the Heroic head called 'Anvers,' and the 'Ecce Homo.' Meunier has rehabilitated the tragic dignity of work, human patience and will battling at its task; he is the recorder of man as he watches and strives, silent in his work, persistent, undemonstrative, grave in life, and mute before death.

X

DALOU

DALOU

SOME twenty-five years ago it was not an uncommon thing to hear that French art was in complete decadence, that two artists alone, Bastien Lepage and Dalou, stood out in the average of her school, which was 'doubtless clever—but tricky.' Time and fashion have dealt very roughly (too roughly in fact) with Lepage ; Dalou has survived for several reasons, among which we may count his genuine and instinctive ability.

For some years an exile in England, he is still remembered as an indirect educational influence on our more timid local sculpture. France, in the second virgin blush of her Third Republic, has welcomed him again as a new republican sculptor—the sculptor in fact of the Republic ; at its best his work is assured of enduring admiration, at its worst it is a survival from the Second Empire. Easy in

his art, engaging, and a little florid, to some he is an admirable 'piece sculptor,' to others he is a 'decorative sculptor'; both verdicts are founded on his facility. Admirable at times in the execution of the 'piece,' he never achieves however the mastery which Rodin for instance reveals in a bust or fragment; with one or two very notable exceptions, Dalou has executed but a few fine busts. In his large decorative works he is spirited and effective, if a little shallow in invention; they are genial and abundant, somewhat rhetorical, and admirably illustrative of their sounding titles, 'Fraternity uniting the People,' 'Time striving to wrest the wreath from Fame.' In this he is essentially French—he shares the temper of a people that has inherited the old Latin sense of effect. There is often a pictorial force in the utterances of Napoleon and the men of the Revolution. Delacroix and even Puvis de Chavannes give titles to their paintings which have an epigrammatic terseness and a Latin force. Dalou is in everything traditional and Gallic; he is at his ease in the public place and in the palace—that is, a French palace where Fame,

Victory, and the Arts find a home even on the cornices. I would state this without the slightest insular or provincial British prejudice. I recognise in our more shy and remote sense of art a lesser vitality, even a lesser conviction; I am even inclined to think that our coldness towards emphasis of utterance, or condensed thought, or effective symbol accounts to some extent for the small hold the sculpture of Alfred Stevens has achieved upon cultivated people in this country. Dalou lived for several years in England, known to his contemporaries as a facile and dainty craftsman whose work showed something of the indefinable quality which might be described as 'le sourire du XVIII^e siècle.' In the Victorian era, to which we are beginning to look back as one of great refinement, anterior to the sort of 'Hôtel Ritz' ideal of life now prevailing, Dalou obtained employment even from royalty, and to the English phase of his career we owe two very fine works, an admirable bust of Mrs. Crowe and an admirable seated portrait of Lady Carlisle. English taste, with its leaning towards the pretty, encouraged Dalou only in that

phase of his practice in which he is the descendant from the charming craftsmen of the eighteenth century, and he is often of their rank. He is not to be classed with the foremost of them, like the incomparable Houdon (one of France's truly great artists); even Clodion, with all his desperate facility and monotony, is perhaps more endowed in that essential element of personality—being, in fact, a sort of eighteenth-century Rossellino; but a comparison between Dalou and the work of Clodion, Falconet, and Pajou is not always crushing to the modern Frenchman. Dalou's work, in fact, seems better in the vicinity of the sculpture of the eighteenth century than in the company of the major sculptors of the nineteenth; there is a latent feverishness in the work of Carpeaux, which was due perhaps to the lingering influence of Delacroix; the more austere art of Barye, Rodin, and Meunier are even less allied, though Dalou in some of his latest works has not concealed his acknowledged admiration for Meunier. Rude, the republican who incarnates the Revolution and the First Empire, has had little influence upon him, the republican and socialist; it

is Houdon and Clodion, who were crushed by the Revolution, who are the sponsors of his art. Perhaps Puget and Caffieri were not far off; both had stood sponsor to Carpeaux; but these masters felt and modelled with a more violent and expressive force. Dalou's work stands below them in character, below them in effort and conviction; he is too fluent, too easy, and too local.

Perhaps the last sentence requires some explanation, for in the long run it will be found that most good artists focus for us the temper of some locality or period in which the casual and contemporary man is very anxious to claim some after share. Let us for the moment grant that most art could only have been done when and where it was done. We find, nevertheless, that the major men stand above these more obvious relationships; they catch light from each other, even at a distance, and illumine the future of a great tradition, such as it has been the privilege of Italy and France, the two major civilising nations, to produce: the masters stand out as beacons on different heights. However related to French thought

and emotion, the sculpture of Rodin, for instance, is equally related to that of Donatello and Michelangelo, whose teaching he turns to his own special uses. Barye, though one of the great figures of the Romantic period, faces the essential elements of his craft with a directness and precision which carry us back in thought almost to a pre-Pheidean epoch. Below such men stand their artistic contemporaries, who translate into a more general tongue the more personal messages of the major man; these secondary craftsmen influence the temper of their period and nation, and form the connecting and reflecting mass between different masters and different traditions. This faculty for absorption and dilution, this faculty for continuity and reconciliation, is a great element in the French character, and nothing escapes it. It is in the comprehension of that which is traditional and national in French sculpture that Dalou is at his best; a slight accent of his own epoch — that, namely, of the Third Republic—accounts for an indefinable lack of what I would call spirituality therein. The amiability of the eighteenth century is more

nimble and delicate, its vivacity more delicately bred. In the art of Dalou we find that the kindred elements in the work of such great French sculptors as Puget and Carpeaux have become reconciled to Clodion, whose fresh, wet clay-work Dalou can emulate, whose method of sketching he at times possessed. The head of Diana by Dalou is a younger sister of the more aristocratic and exquisite goddess by Houdon, who in her turn, perhaps, claims relationship with the lithe, elegant figures of the French Renaissance. Strangely enough, the bust by the modern sculptor is even more in the manner of the eighteenth century than its prototype. Dalou's Diana seems on the watch for some rude, sudden cupid by Fragonard, bent on stealing her arrows. His study of a 'Sleeping Child' might be some piece of sculpture introduced by Chardin in a group of accessories illustrating the arts. Both these works are exquisite; they are illumined by the spirit of a charmed period—that of the eighteenth century—they are touched with the sunlight of France, to use the exquisite words of the great Gluck.

Like many facile and quite instinctive artists, Dalou believed he had also some major intellectual mission, and to that impression we owe two successful works, 'The Monument of the Republic' with its decorative lions, cherubs, and buxom women, and a fine bas-relief of 'Fraternity Uniting the People.' Both are virile in modelling and fine in the sense of movement; they are equal in quality to the superb 'Silenus and Nymphs' in the Luxembourg Gardens, which has no didactic aim. In these pictorial groups the sense of vitality runs high, the invention and modelling are rich and easy; they are worth a dozen monuments to Gambetta, or the projected 'Pillar to the Proletariat' or 'Monument du Travail' with its hastily invented series of workmen niched in a ridiculous tower.

I have stated that Dalou was unsuccessful in most of his busts. In this he inherited too little from his master Carpeaux, or from Houdon, who are both two of the greatest, perhaps the two greatest, portrait sculptors. Yet, to me at least, there is one exception in his life-work, namely, the bust of Delacroix. This is so admirable that one wonders if too great

an habitual reliance upon nature may not account for some of his failures. It is true that in the bust of Delacroix the sculptor had the fine nervous portrait by the master to follow, yet this does not discount the fact that the result surpasses anticipation; that it reveals imaginative insight, showing us Delacroix as he stands in history, concentrated and intense, one of those who are 'impassioned of passion.' This vivid face in bronze is worthy of the model; it is outside and beyond the habitual temper and gift of Dalou and is possessed of the finest qualities possible in portraiture—namely, insight and verisimilitude.

XI

ADOLPH VON MENZEL

ADOLPH VON MENZEL

THIS magnificent volume,[1] containing over six hundred illustrations, and a short introduction by the eminent and foreseeing Dr. Hugo van Tschudi, gives the best general survey of Menzel's work yet published. It renews with me the recollection of the very complete exhibition held in Paris about twenty-five years ago. This was an event of the greatest significance, since we owe to Menzel the most precious and genial record of Wilhelm I. and of things German during a period which might be described as A.D. Bismarck. I mention this exhibition, for it established the immunity of art from all local accidents. It was also the proof of the appreciation the painter had earned on all hands; for Menzel is one of the few great artists in the nineteenth century who during his lifetime has been acknow-

[1] Adolph von Menzel. *Abbildungen seiner Gemälde und Studien.* München; Brückmann.

ledged by the official and unofficial worlds, by his own countrymen, and by foreigners alike. His work has a general, not a local, interest.

Menzel is a realist, perhaps the only realist in modern painting, though observation and a love of facts have been symptomatic of the larger portion of modern art. His is the infinite capacity for taking pains which might be described as the essence of realism. He expresses profoundly that somewhat middle-class assertion of a busy, personal choice which finds a counterpart in the realistic literature of thirty years ago. We might describe him as one with the reaction against romanticism, and above all against the faculties of the imagination, did not a portion of his work (that related to Frederick the Great) present notable qualities of thought and emotion, and that constructive vision which we do not usually associate with realistic art. In this portion of Menzel's work the eighteenth century seems to live again with a variety and veracity we shall not detect even in its portrait painters, wherein the vivacious ' masks '

or sketches of Latour stand alone as a record of things seen, or rather of faces as they were. The pretty, false illustrations of Moreau le Jeune and of Dubucourt reflect something of its furniture and clothes; even Hogarth, Longhi, and the minute Chodowiecki do not succeed always in convincing us, though their aim was to convince. Menzel by his grip on individual character and his sense of the intimacy of movement, his rendering of the naïveté of dress, and the constant perception of the 'likely' persuades us into the belief that such indeed was the eighteenth century; not so Hogarth with his violent and didactic vision; still less the feeble Longhi with his inanimate marionettes, or Chodowiecki with his little clockwork figures. Menzel's evocation of the times of Frederick strikes one as a thing seen.

With Menzel the love of realism was not only temperamental, it was an intellectual bent; the same faculties of analysis he brought to bear on the reconstruction of the eighteenth century were applied to his own times. It is in his faculty of analysis that he differs from those artists who, at some time, have been

called realistic. In the forties and fifties Menzel painted studies of town and suburban life, nooks in nature and chance glimmerings of light upon everyday things, which influenced Degas and other artists we are accustomed to describe as Impressionists or painters of 'Real life,' with capital letters to both words. I do not forget that impressionism, or the modern sense of the things to paint, has its origin also in the large but unthinking naturalism of Courbet (notably with Manet), but Menzel painted the 'Balconzimmer,' the 'Théâtre Gymnase,' besides countless other glimpses of actuality, some twenty years before we shall find such things in the work of Manet, Charles Keene, and Degas. A marked affinity between Degas and Menzel survives up to the eighties, when the temperamental differences between the two artists and their nationality asserts itself; and whilst Degas drifts more and more into 'pattern,' we detect in Menzel something of the passion to observe merely for its own sake which underlies his vast industry, patience, and boundless curiosity. With the great German the thing to say, or the way to say it,

becomes too often tangled and confused, and we have works, like 'The Market Place at Verona,' in which the realism has ceased to be genial and has become elaborate and in a sense theoretic.

Are we to deny to Menzel that larger and more synthetic perception which we value in all great art (in Millet, for instance), and so rank him with those artists who are merely ingenious—mere hunters after the curious which may be found in everyday things? His large picture, 'The Steel Forge,' is there, not wholly to cancel such a verdict, but to modify it.

Has Menzel done fine things in portraiture? He has done so in the tangle of his pictures, notably in his studies for the 'Coronation of Wilhelm I.,' and in that masterpiece of genre, the 'Cercle am Hofe Kaiser Wilhelms I.,' but not so in separate, specialised portrait painting; in this he is almost insignificant and ill at ease. What were his limitations, since he has drawn and painted most things and worked in most mediums? His fault was a temperamental lack of proportion, something casual in the fibre of the man, not in the artist; he was

indifferent to the essential harmonies which the artist expresses in line and mass : he was indifferent to beauty. By this let me be understood by Englishmen, who confuse beauty with prettiness of fact. Menzel was capable of noting grace when he came upon it, just as he was capable of rendering the wrinkles on a pair of boots or a spot on a wall ; his scrupulous realism made him note the beautiful if it chanced his way ; but the major harmonies of his craft were replaced by the notes and reminiscences of a spirited raconteur ; his eye noted variety, he loved animated incident and detail, he was restless like nature herself. Menzel never attempted that ordering of his perception and emotion which makes for style, nor had he that sense of crisis which also makes for beauty. The bustle and fuss of a restaurant or railway station delighted him and proved sufficient ; he even told small fibs in his wish to convey vivacity and animation, crumpling faces and clothes into convention of his own. I do not state this with the wish to belittle, since an artist is valuable in proportion to the success he has achieved in the field he has chosen. His

faults were to some extent those of a period which was over self-reliant, grasping, and egotistic in its sense of life ; his qualities were all his own ; and no gallery of art which should aim at a comprehensive record of the nineteenth century could afford to be without some specimen of his work as a painter, and above all as a draughtsman.

XII

POST-IMPRESSIONISM AT THE GRAFTON GALLERY

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This article was written two years ago for the *Nineteenth Century*. A forced absence of three months abroad rendered its publication impossible. It is earlier in date than two excellent articles on the subject published in the *Nineteenth Century*, and any chance parallel in thought is therefore fortuitous.

EVERY art movement has to face not only the hostility of its opponents, it has to pass through a more dangerous ordeal when ridicule is brought upon it by its belated following, from which often emerges the reaction against it. Classicism failed in France in the hands of the pupils of Ingres; a compromise between their practice and a melodramatic view of Romanticism produced Delaroche, with whom both aims were combined. To-day Impressionism has to face its parody and the opposition fostered within its ranks, and Post-Impressionism stands to-day against its parent. Art is to become young again, but the slate must be cleaned for the

new message to appear in the form of a sub-conscious ecstasy, from which our past and present must be erased, so that we may attain to the synthetic outlook of childhood, in which lies the only possibility of the future. Such at least is the programme of its advocates.

Not only has Post-Impressionism been championed in the *Burlington Magazine*, where it is promised a larger and fuller life than pre-Raphaelitism; it has been hailed elsewhere as a novelty, against which it would be injudicious to slam the door. Post-Impressionist works may some day be deemed masterpieces!

Caliban worshipped the god Setibos, and Novelty may also be a god! Alas, that criticism should doubt itself and forgo all choice when Caliban did not doubt; he only feared. These critics do both.

Novelty in itself is valueless. The spirit of beauty and power, of which art is the expression, has centuries behind it; it is as old as thought. From the day that the first flint flake chanced to resemble the shell-like hollow which might become a cup, art has aimed at permanence, not at novelty, which is a later-

day fiction. The new has ever had to prove its value against the experience of the past before it could be considered admirable. To revert in the name of 'novelty' to the aims of the savage and the child—out of lassitude of the present—is to act as the anarchist, who would destroy where he cannot change. To wish to blot out the page upon which our knowledge is written, in the hope of a new thrill of expectancy, is an old form of petulance. It is as old as the spirit that denies. Bad in art, it is deplorable in criticism. Its advocacy here should be laid at the door of the impressarios of the movement, which claims Cézanne as its root and Monsieur Matisse as its flower. Against the painters themselves it is less urgent to be hostile; they may believe —Caliban believed—and among them are men of varying attainments. All these 'experimentalists' are united in one fault, they are over-confident; they forget that the place for the experiment is the studio; it is not an aim but a means. I would also accuse them of lacking in tenderness towards their craft, and of a lack of humour, were these qualities

not rarer still in the apostles and advocates of the movement. Mr. Fry, who is now their champion, is without pity for his contemporaries, who are not Post-Impressionists; he is as merciless as Herr Meier Graefe in Germany, who scoffs at Reynolds and Turner, and will none of our modern art—who does so, however, in a spirit of rapid and half-playful cynicism, which is in total contrast to the austerity of his British rival, who bids us 'Hope no more' save in the art where the spirit of the 'rocking horse' is one with the 'treeness' of the trees which flourish in the meadows of the mind of Monsieur Matisse.

I should not insist on the advocacy of Post-Impressionism, since it has come mainly from the sponsors or organisers of the Grafton Gallery Exhibition. Like the painting shown there, it may be sincere and, in its degree, interesting or curious, had it not been the cause, or at least so I imagine, of bringing together an imposing honorary committee, on which we find the names of three Museum directors and trustees of the National Gallery. Should these gentlemen have been familiar with Post-Impressionism and admirers of its achieve-

ments, we might feel nervous about the future character of our institutions; should they have been ignorant of this movement, which is twenty years old, one's astonishment is not less. Under no circumstances could we imagine their standing sponsors to a similar venture devoted to modern English art; there are public reasons which would even render this inadvisable.

The group of dealers who have loaned these pictures, and the organised propaganda in Germany, might afford the stuff for an article. The painters themselves merely labour under the blinding weight of their egotism when against them is placed the barrier beyond which the losel and the lunatic cannot stray, on which is written, 'Know thy Self.'

Was this reactionary temper, this singular emphasis of personal limitations, contained and foredoomed in the theory of Impressionism itself, in its advocacy of side issues and contempt for its foes? Who shall say? The triumph of Impressionism is denied by these laggard followers, who would also be crowned. To-day is not to-morrow, and beyond lie countless other 'to-days.' The inexorable power of

selection, which often stumbles in its need, may choose amiss. Impressionism to-day or something else—of this who knows ?

Success in art consists in the power of concentrating the result of countless experiences and emotions within the restricted surface of canvas. With this effort the outlook of the child upon life has nothing in common. To trust chance personal intuitions only, and never to doubt, is allied to the strange persistent egotism of animals; and against this stands the intellect of man, ' the paragon of animals.'

There is the fruit for small talk, the possibilities of self-assertion in the acceptance of Post-Impressionism ; there is also the stuff for journalistic copy ; but can we imagine this manner of painting upon the walls of our homes, or indeed anywhere else, than upon a hoarding, where the stridency of its appeal might arrest one for a while, till our streets resembled the rooms in the Grafton Gallery ?

Post-Impressionism or Proto-Byzantinism, as it has been fatuously described, claims Cézanne as its half-conscious founder or pioneer. Cézanne's paintings are laboured in effect; a

suffering sense of 'values' made him plaster his canvases with pigment in some sort of parody of the pictures of Manet. For a while he plodded on, affording Zola 'copy' for his novel *L'Œuvre*; to Manet and Degas he seemed but a provincial satellite, a compromising follower of Impressionism. He left Paris doubtful of himself, doubtful also of the school whose novelty and notoriety had cast a spell upon him. He is one of those countless failures who have set out 'to conquer Paris,' to use the 'romantic' phrase of M. Zola's.

Cézanne was a failure, and believed that he had failed, yet Sir Claude Phillips recognises a savage grandeur in some of his still-life paintings of jugs and pumpkins. To me his pictures seem mere accumulations of thick pigment, applied to hack subjects designed in the style of our 'Proto-Byzantine' pavement artists; they lack only the written appeal, 'Please remember the artist.' This is done by his advocates and by the cosmopolitan dealer, who sees that he, at least, is not forgotten.

Monsieur Maurice Denis confesses, 'Cézanne seems to bring us health and promises us a

renaissance by bringing before us an ideal akin to that of the Venetian decadence.' He also adds, 'I have never heard an admirer of Cézanne give me a clear or precise reason for his admiration. . . . Now of Delacroix or Manet one could formulate a reasoned appreciation which would be clearly intelligible, but how hard it is to be precise about Cézanne.' Cézanne will help us; he was quite explicit in his judgment of his paintings; he left them in the fields, not deeming them worthy to take home.

Monsieur Gaugin in his earliest canvases shows the influence of Cézanne, the 'Timon of Impressionism'; his Breton pictures are in part influenced by him. Dare I confess that I do not always dislike his pictures of Tahitian life. Their technical shortcomings have a left-handed affinity with Degas's later and 'less studied' works. The strangeness of his subject-matter attracts me, not his painting.

I have a childish liking for savage art, idols of feathers, amulets of wood; a mere shell-tipped arrow-head conjures up the magic of distances, or the aromatic gloom of forests where a savage might crouch, watching for

his prey, silent, immovable, primæval, whilst at his side some large flower opens, fades, and sinks unnoticed upon its stem. I can imagine this in the space between the musical cries of the tide in the coral reef beyond and the boom, like distant cannon, of the sea on its return. In Gaugin's pictures I like the snake-like trees, the grape-coloured women; I do not hate their impassiveness and lack of 'significant gesture' or something at once animal and vegetal in the life he paints. His art is a by-path of painting. He is not Proto-Byzantine, but, like a sailor with shells and parrot feathers in his trunk, he would bring us something from those distant lands where the tree-roots clasp at the sea-weed on the water's edge, or bend beneath the hurricanes that send crashing through the trees strange wreckage from the seas. Of his painting it is possible to say, this I like, this I like less.

Of Cézanne there is little to be said, of his influence upon Van Gogh there is more; of Monsieur Matisse, the latest of the Proto-Byzantines, there is nothing to say; yet one and all are still related to the parent 'Impres-

sionist' movement which they would deny. Most of these canvases are devoted to the old familiar subjects which contented Courbet and Manet fifty years ago, such as 'Femme en bleu,' or the chance names of women or places; were they capably painted we would describe them as later-day Impressionist pictures. Even Gaugin's aim is in the main subjective, and it is only the left-handed workmanship which differentiates Post-Impressionism from other mere hack transcripts from nature done within the last thirty years. Monsieur M. Denis alone has brought a decorative or symbolic element to this 'agony of Impressionism,' and with him we are on familiar ground. Unlike the poor, mad Van Gogh and the other hermits of individuality, his work is allied to current tendencies in literature and music. His art is the fashion; it has the qualities and faults of fashion.

Ever since the rumour in France of English pre-Raphaelitism and the Anglo-Belgian influence upon the crafts, something which might be termed 'the cult of the Lily' has been intermittent in Paris, and spread with the importation of Liberty fabrics. This tend-

ency has other roots in Symbolist literature; it can be traced back even to the success of *Parsifal* and what was written about it in Paris. On the whole, many of these elements are admirable in themselves, and revert to past noble aims and achievements. A trace of neo-classicism is never long absent from French thought, and Pan and his nymphs have been invited to stray in the vales of the new Avalon.

Monsieur Denis has caught something of all this; he is 'neo-pagan,' he is also a neo-Catholic; he remembers the great Puvis de Chavannes, but without the nobility of vision, breadth of design, and largeness of emotion of that master. I am irresistibly tempted to describe him as the new 'Paris de Chavannes.' He exhibits in the spring and autumn salons, and has 'arrived' unsinged from the realistic gardens of Klingsor, having conquered the Kundry of Impressionism. His art is bland, ingenious, not without charm; it is only in his use of colour that he forces a pleasant talent of compromise. Some day he may pass within the dome of the Institute of France.

Germany, who is omnivorous of anything

Parisian, is enthusiastic about Maurice Denis; and if to-day we can hear energetic Wagnerian singers cry '*Ach! ach! ich bin nicht beglückt*' to the pale harmonies of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, so we shall find the decorative canvases of M. Denis enthroned in provincial museums, where the more local Boecklin ruled but yesterday, ranked in estimation only below the masterpieces of Van Gogh, in whose work lies the future, with which we have been threatened by some fervent critics, since he is at once the savage, the madman, and the child.

Has failure a magnetic attraction of its own which brings failure to failure, or is it merely united by a common effort to reach success which belongs to others? Lands without art have welcomed Cézanne; not all France, nor England, nor Holland,[1] but Germany, Russia, and America. Those who failed as Impressionists have found salvation in his example. Foremost amongst them is Van Gogh.

Some twenty years have passed since I last read extracts from the interesting letters of

[1] Since this was written a collector has presented to the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam, a selection of Post-Impressionist pictures. He has since gone mad, and died in an asylum.

this man who suffered under the stress of religious and artistic mania. Do we quite realise the strange atmosphere in which some later-day art moves—the impatience to arrive, the exasperated and paradoxical theories in which Proto-Byzantinism has been possible? In Russia a blind painter, once an Impressionist, gropes to-day with pins upon canvases; between the spaces he smears barbaric colour, thereby obtaining more curious and 'advanced' results than does Monsieur Matisse even. A strong German Impressionist—my informant is a museum official—proposes to work in the future in coloured wools because nothing 'new' can be done with pigment. Alas for the worsted pictures and flowers of our grandmothers, how gracious, new and instinctive was your gentle art!

Into the studio atmosphere which Zola described some twenty-five years ago in *L'Œuvre*, poor Van Gogh started 'to find himself' and to sink under the stress. With his religious frenzy we are not concerned:—that he should have cut off one of his ears in that kind of place in which Shakespeare has placed part of the fourth act of *Pericles*, to

prove that physical pain does not exist, is interesting only to a doctor. Of his struggles and the mental 'strabism' of his art we can form some idea in his weird canvases, where the commonplaces of 'painting from nature' have become tortured by some horror of vision of which he may have been not wholly conscious. I have seen his fate compared to that of Nietzsche, in whose life we see the rapid and overwhelming accumulation of complex faculties crushing in the brain that could no longer bear their weight. The poor mad painter Van Gogh grasped at nothing; the soul did not bruise itself against the outer wall of adamant beyond which lies the unknowable. Compassion should make us silent upon the humble abnormality of his work and thoughts, had some critics not pointed to him as a master for our study and example.

What a subject for some Russian novelist in the account of this man, who sought his life, possibly in some chance moment of insight, when the aspect of the picture he was painting flashed upon him in the field where he shot himself. The shot failed, leaving him

for two timeless hours to struggle some few paces to the roadside inn beyond—struggling without visible movement perhaps, stirring only inch by inch towards the place where he would creep to die. There he lingered on for two days more, his teeth clenched upon an unlit pipe, with face and soul locked in silence, till the pipe and its ashes dropped out upon the floor, and consciousness and agony had ceased.

The history of much recent art in France is like a blind battlefield. Impressionism, and the reaction within its ranks, has been embittered by the wish to owe nothing, save only to itself, or admit the debt which each artist pays willingly or unwillingly to his forerunners in the past. How strange the thought that the language of art which has centuries of experience in its structure can be made anew, that the vocabulary and matter alike must change, lest we repeat what has already been said !

I would avoid all ludicrous pseudo-scientific exaggeration of those common vicissitudes in life which pass unnoticed in the many, but may be made significant in men who are before the public. I have no wish, like the followers

of Lombroso, to open a grave to examine the dentation of Dante, to detect the fancied sign which might class him among potential criminals. Yet all critics have not noted or valued the obscure hints at folly, the signs of aphasia and the obliquity of vision in many later-day works of art. In other walks of life, these shortcomings have serious disadvantages — colour-blindness unfits a man for the navy. Some critics would seem to prize all accidents that can be written about; they praise individuality whatever its character, and novelty whatever its kind. There is an affinity between egotism, madness and anarchy which is but another form of madness. Many maniacs feel they have a vocation and set no store upon our common experience: this is the case with many of these painters. Have the English advocates of Post-Impressionism realised this? But of these it is difficult to speak who has not cast his lot upon a chance, and sacrificed the wisdom of centuries of thought to catch at opportunity. Their aim has nothing to do with art or its future, it is but a new phase of self-advertisement.

XIII

JAPANESE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE AT THE ANGLO-JAPANESE EXHIBITION

JAPANESE PAINTING AND SCULPTURE AT THE ANGLO-JAPANESE EXHIBITION

IT would be almost impossible to overestimate the importance of the exhibition of Japanese masterpieces of sculpture and painting now on view at the White City, or even do justice to the patriotism and generosity which has made possible the formation of a collection which ranges in date from a time when St. Sophia was still a new building, to the decade in which Mr. Whistler was influenced by Hiroshige. On two former occasions Europe has had the opportunity of studying specimen pieces of the art which the Japanese prize most, Paris being in each case the congenial centre. I am not aware that any country in Europe has ever contemplated a return of the compliment, and that a loan of Western art, including works from the time of

Giotto to that of Corot, will ever be held in Tokio. The outlook which this exhibition presents will therefore not be entirely strange to some art lovers: I must even add that, thanks to the initiative of Sir Sidney Colvin, the British Museum is rich in rare Japanese paintings; but the White City contains some marvellous pieces of sculpture from unimpeachable sources, of which no European collection can give an idea, the Imperial Household Museum, the treasuries of temples, and some princely houses being among the contributors. I would not claim the expert knowledge which could view these rare things in relation to the ideals they express. How many Europeans are possessed of this? How many care to acquire the slightest knowledge of the fascinating thought and heroic history of Japan? I would merely value these works from the point of view of a Western art lover, and beg the reader to peep over my shoulder whilst I read out the labels and try to evoke desultory impressions from past experiences, and from a still more desultory reading of a few Eastern and Western authorities.

I would leave out of consideration the small models of famous Japanese temples, since we can form no opinion of their relation to their surroundings, and about all models of buildings there is always a suggestion of the toy-house and toy-box, the cabinetmaker supplanting the architect. They lack that variety of aspect, the unfolding of vistas, the play of light and shade which gives life to architecture. Of these buildings, dating from the seventh to the seventeenth century, little remains but the line of the roofs, the greater or lesser beauty of the eaves or cornices, for, where the European architect builds with walls, the Japanese builder plans open spaces, and here all can be covered by a man's hand as a measure.

Let us go straight to the sculpture, and, in point of date, a little bronze Buddha of the seventh century is the first thing to compel attention. Suave and simple in design, a fretted halo alone adds an element of richness to the scheme. The god leans his head upon one hand: nothing in the pose suggests an austere and remote self-abstraction, but instead, a mood of musical melancholy. Something of

the peace of the temples of Nara lingers about this delicate work, which hails from the Imperial collection. In the same case is a wooden phœnix of the same date, like a Sassanide griffon, almost like a Greek thing, with outstretched upward wings. These works charm me more than the important bronze grill of the eighth century, and the rich and almost sensual-looking Kwannon (ninth century) from the Diagoji Temple, which are both famous. The epoch of religious sculpture culminates, as far as the interest of the exhibition is concerned, in two large superb Devas of the tenth century, and comes to a close with the ornate but exquisite Kwannon of the fourteenth century, lent by the Emperor, in which we shall find summarised all the characteristics of Japanese religious sculpture as it is known to Europeans in the work of later and still more elaborate periods.

So far nothing in these statues is strange; the noble French sculptures at Corbeil and Arles are immeasurably more remote and less expressive; the elaborate jewels, the floating scarves which curve round the large gilded

Kwannon, like spirals of incense, have an exotic but not unwelcome beauty. Certain elaborations of the facial type are curious to Western eyes, hardly more so, however, than the archaic smiles and dimples of a Gothic ivory. This delicate statue resembles the rich Buddhist paintings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when Japanese life passed through a period for which Provence, before the Albigeois Crusade, may furnish a rough parallel. It was, however, executed in a period of energetic strife, to which its voluptuous mysticism must have seemed strange and perhaps not unwelcome.

The paintings, which are contemporary with the earlier statues, do not compass the same measure of mastery. The designs on the copy of the famous Tamamushi shrine (seventh century), like the earliest Chinese pictures known to me, suggest the end of a school more than a beginning. The design representing Buddha giving his body to a hungry tigress, to feed her young, is interesting but without the commanding quality of the earlier carvings, and despite the large imposing Rikku

enthroned, of the ninth century, the interest of the painting begins with two fine scrolls representing a male Kwannon, of the eleventh century, and a Bodhisattva, both characterised alike by the utmost beauty of workmanship and colour. The last, in its many mounts, the outer one being of late European brocade, hangs between two rich dim paintings of hieratic Lotuses. One likes to believe that it was over works like these that the picture competition took place in one of the late chapters of the classic romance of Gengi Monogatari, which illustrates a phase of Japanese culture for which we shall find a parallel perhaps in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, with its æsthetic discussions, self-analysis, and all-pervading feminine aroma.

The interest of the religious pictures is more than maintained in the twelfth-century kakemono of a deity in a halo of pale silver, enthroned upon a lion, which is to me one of the most beautiful things in the entire exhibition. Like the two carved Devas, such works give a ready reason for the pride with which Japan views the art of the Fujiwara epoch.

If the pictures I have so far praised reveal the conventions which are common to all early painting before the striving after exact representation, and a precision which characterises almost all hieratic art, the spiritual content is alone unfamiliar. In the next epoch the immediate appeal is less certain. To me at least the famous ink scroll by Toba Sojio, the humorist priest-painter of the twelfth century, has not the significance it possesses to Japanese eyes,[1] or the interest which has made painters in different centuries return to him again and again. Two undescribed panels of the thirteenth century, showing possible traces of Tenjinengi (the very existence of Keion is now doubted), belong to the epoch of historical painting. In one of these two babes sprawl on the floor of hell, and recall those infants who appeared in vision to some tragic Christian saint. If the classical Tosa school is almost absent from the exhibition as it now stands, an astonishing piece of portrait sculpture is here to testify to a period of heroic effort:

[1] Since this was written its authenticity has been disallowed by the latest expert opinions of Japan.

this is a superb statue in carved and painted wood of the thirteenth century. To me it is perhaps the masterpiece of the exhibition. This figure possesses something of the direct appeal and intense inward life which fascinates the spectator in the 'Egyptian Scribe,' who haunts you in the Louvre with the gaze of his crystal eyes which have not closed for more than four thousand years; who watches, pen in hand, gazing into time, which he would seem to read. The Japanese statue broods upon some other dream; he waits with half-closed lids for a different vision to arise. This masterwork is casually placed near an exit, yet even slack, vulgar sight-seers stop and make uncouth and vaguely respectful remarks. It is a work to which one returns with excitement and anticipation: perhaps he will speak!

A new wave of thought, following on a renaissance of Chinese culture, touches Japan in the fifteenth century. The masters of the late Sung and Mongol dynasties influence a famous series of Japanese painters, who are here represented almost to a man. Foremost in rarity and historical importance must be ranked the

two paintings by Cho Densu—1351-1427. As a man this artist resembled Fra Angelico: I am not sure if he is not actually a *beato*, but in his attitude toward classical Chinese painting we are reminded of Mantegna and his worship of all things Roman. Dare I admit that, despite the characterisation of some of the heads—not all—his two pictures leave me cold. I dislike the colour and design alike. Till now I had admired a painting ascribed to him in the British Museum of a Buddhist 'St. Jerome' in a Chinese desert. To me his works at the White City are the great disappointment of the Japanese section.

I have again to confess to a sense of guilt when I declare that the paintings of Sesshiu do not always account for the estimation in which he is held in his own country. Had he not painted the fine 'Hotei' in the British Museum, and, better still, the noble Jurojin gazing out from among delicate tree branches, which Mr. Binyon has published in his delightful book on Eastern painting, I would, if I may be pardoned the Irishism, have classed Sesshiu among his imitators. I mistook his two landscapes

for the work of his disciple Sesson, who, strangely enough, is present with one of the loveliest works in the exhibition—his beautiful kakemono shows two ghostly herons among ghostly reeds, out of which gleam some pale roses. The artist has not striven to render the luxurious intricacy, the rich pulp and smooth flesh of the flowers, but some hint at their fragrance. One thinks of a perfume poured upon new snow, of the scent of hidden flowers in the cool of dawn, for an equivalent to express the strange and remote delicacy of the work.

Before the large triptych by Motonobu I am like the man who disliked *Hamlet*—'because it was too full of quotations.' So much in these large ink drawings has since become the property of a school that I do not realise all the privilege of the master. I would grant, however, that his heroic kakemono in the British Museum is probably the finest Japanese figure-painting I have so far seen. Have I once more illustrated that European reluctance to accept the Japanese estimate of one of its most powerful traditions? Am I wrong in suspecting the Kano school, beneath its

gravity and austerity of aim, of the latent 'academism' to which it ultimately succumbed? Japanese opinion is there to refute such a conclusion. Yet my memory harks back to the tyranny of the Italian landscape in the past: to-day even the French are unable to visualise N. Poussin as the best Italian eclectic, who sometimes painted Roman scenery in France, and this feeling makes me wonder if a Kano painter did not once try to paint the invisible garments worn by that Chinese emperor whose new clothes are so often the fashion in old and new schools of art and criticism alike.

I have considered the development of Japanese sculpture and painting under Indian or Indo-Mongol ideals; the stream of thought had poured like a current from some tropical clime, where things are driven into rapid maturity and decay, to a land where the seed carried among the flotsam and jetsam will take root and grow strong under a more bracing sky. The tendency of Indian and Chinese civilisation was constantly to crumble into dust; in Japan it was maintained and transformed by a race forced to temperance and energy

by the limits of a land walled in and guarded by its coasts and sea. Of Buddhist art there has been no trace for centuries in India and China. In Japan the tradition is even yet unbroken. I remember a picture of Kwannon by the late Kano Hogai which might be placed next to a masterpiece of the past.

If the great brush-workers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries combined an austere idealism of thought with a certain monotony of range, this disappears in the phase of Japanese painting which I am about to consider; here a recasting of æsthetic and symbolic values takes place, and a decorative sense is evolved for which Japan has remained famous among the nations. We now enter upon the epoch of great palace decorations and monumental screens, characterised by a sense of haughty luxury, for which the names of Yeitoku and Korin can pass as the symbols. I am ready to admit that the pensive ideality which was the objective of Sesshiu is a thing of the past, unless it returns in one of the latest artists of the nineteenth century—Yosai, namely. A new splendour supplants the old reticence of aim,

and Nature is again watched with younger eyes. Against skies of gold and silver rise colonnades of trees or processions of irises; vast clouds pass over foaming seas or blot out battalions of heraldic flowers. The energy of the time asserts itself ostentatiously with Yeitoku; the more delicate but hardly less gorgeous art of Sotatsu is represented only by a lacquer box of his design. We are in epoch of the great lacquer masters Koetsu and Korin, who both are here, the first with one of his rare paintings and some priceless lacquers, the second with a box, which has been published, and by a famous pair of screens lent by Baron Koyata Twasaki, and by a silk painting which illustrates a dainty side of his intense and complex genius.

Some years ago I had the delightful and stimulating experience of trying to give an idea of the sequence and proportionate importance of the great European masters to a Japanese student of the art of his own country. My knowledge of Eastern art was only that which this article shows, but my Japanese friend knew nothing of Europe. Under his questions the

strain put upon my habitual admirations was not unlike that which a man might experience were an angel to question him about his beliefs, or the reason for wearing our modern clothes. I felt bashful at times about the art of many masters, and some nations even, whilst the greatness of some famous Japanese seemed to him almost too difficult to convey. He seemed astonished when I confessed what I thought of Korin; to him Korin focused certain tendencies, doubtlessly in a splendid way, yet with an emphasis which seemed sensational to his taste and altogether delightful to me. I am still impenitent; I consider Korin one of the most notable artists in the history of the world. Works by and ascribed to him have been sumptuously published in Japan: I like the copies of his designs executed by later hands; I like Koetsu, who influenced him, and Hoitsu, who was his imitator—nothing Japanese delights me quite so much. The deeper thought or emotion of older masters can be compared to the achievement of other men in other countries. Korin is incomparable.

Were I to say that he reduces facts to symbols

of their qualities or aspect, I should merely describe what has been the case with all early Japanese painting. Such a definition does not take into account the pattern-making element in his work, which ignores the limitations of fact, and at times sets a wholly arbitrary value upon experience. Do not let us imagine that his art is capricious; no painter has ever been more controlled by a conscious will for design or possessed a stronger rhythmic sense. His work astonishes and charms; daring, yet sure of itself, it is alert and strong. Perhaps a phrase of his expresses his purpose better than my clumsy attempt at definition. These are his words: 'I wish to feel that I am a prince when I paint.'

Some of his works would give a better impression of the general trend of his painting than the two exhibited here. His figure pieces are, I admit, strange to European eyes; with them I am not concerned. The two great screens at the White City show him in a phase where he out-Korins Korin. A grey sea bent into fantastic waves moves silently beneath great golden drifts of cloud with an uncanny force,

as if controlled by the spell of some Eastern Prospero; such a sea would leave the dress of Ferdinand unwetted, and become calm at the bidding of Ariel. Huge boulders stand out; they are volcanic in colour, but of a fantastic shape no geologist would care to scan; about them some vivid trees have clambered, that flourish and exult in the brilliant light of this changeless place where a fairy storm rolls on in silence for ever. What I have described suggests possibly an element of tragic splendour; this is not the aspect of the work itself, which is brilliant and almost gay. Am I right in divining something at once impassive yet exultant in the art of Korin? In life he was arrogant, and at times a little fantastic. Some writer has spoken of the tenderness and gaiety of his art; to me it expresses something else—his gaiety is that of buds upon huge trees; I would as soon accuse a torrent of tenderness because delicate flowers nestle by its brink: and both these comparisons might be the subject of one of his paintings.

I shall not undertake to discuss many charming works which illustrate the ancestry and

beginning of the famous Ukiyoye school. I view Moronobu and his followers as an offshoot of the later Tosa school. They illustrate the end of an old movement more than the beginning of a new one : it is an accident that the popular Japanese print starts with them. I would, for the moment, pass on to Okio and Mori Sosen, since both masters are known as painters, by name at least, to European art lovers.

I have sometimes wondered at the fame of Okio and the importance attached to him by the East and West alike. The fine kakemono of a waterfall, however, justifies his reputation. The downward rush of icy water is finely expressed ; admirable, too, is the contrasted delicacy and fragility of the tender bough of young maple leaves which stretches out to taste the air. He is represented by another painting of peacocks which is frigid and trite. I much prefer the three paintings of monkeys by Mori Sosen, the artist famous alike in legend and in countless forgeries, who lived in the woods to watch the beasts which he drew so well, but who never rose beyond a

conspicuous success in the imitation of fact and that sense of vitality which would endear him to all modern critics and to most modern artists. I must hark back to some paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and point out the vivacity of the works by Shoi, the moth-like kakemono by Ietcho, the dainty portrait of a girl by Sukenobu. Characteristic paintings by Kiyonga and Koriusai show these famous print-makers as painters. Here is Outamaro, but, alas, this hard, glaring and expressionless work evokes the memory of his late imitators. Of his consummate sense of design there is nothing, of his taste in dress and pattern there is still less; the faces have the mask-like aspect of his follower's work, Outamaro the second. His monotonous rival Yeishi far surpasses him with a kakemono which has some charm and character.

Let us examine the gorgeous but not important painting by Hokusai, who is strong and courageous in the greatest tasks, but not in his occasional paintings, which never equal his prints and drawings. Hokusai astonishes Europe. J. F. Millet and Whistler alike viewed him with

admiration ; in his own country he is praised only with the faintest of praises. Is the Western estimate wrong ? Let us realise once and for all that it was made by those who had the knowledge of the art of the world to test him by ; it is not wrong, it has often been wrongly expressed, or at least stated in terms offensive to the Japanese, who resent the oblivion of some thirteen centuries of continuous art effort, and the complete neglect of the classical thought and painting of Japan. Hokusai painted for the people ; his cultured contemporaries preferred Okio and Ganku. I forget who were the contemporaries of Rembrandt whom the Dutch preferred. If Shakespeare never corrected and doubtless wrote too much, let us admit outright that Hokusai drew too often. In everything his faults and qualities were alike excessive. He had too much art to be able to conceal it, and not enough taste ; and this is a divine quality when it is instinctive and profound, as it is with Piero della Francesca and Holbein, who were impassive magicians. To Hokusai, however, was given the eyes to see the universe.

He has rendered the silence of snows and of immemorial peaks and the life of flowers; the laughter of a child moved him; so did the melancholy of the warrior leaning on his lance, and the sweep of relentless seas. He lacked concentration, distinction, style even at times, at least certain aspects of style. He laughed a great deal, too much perhaps, but laughter sometimes frightens the wolf of poverty from the door; not always, so the wolf returned very often to Hokusai, who probably drew him, having the time for nothing better.

The Japanese would probably describe the young lady in the Hokusai painting as 'a little Mutton,' possibly it was commissioned by the wolf.

XIV

THE CHINESE PAINTINGS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

THE CHINESE PAINTINGS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

IT is now over twenty years ago that a section of Chinese and Japanese paintings, acquired in Japan by the late Dr. Anderson, was exhibited in the white wing of the British Museum. Within the last ten years all have been submitted to the study of Oriental experts, and, under the advice of Mr. Binyon, the scope of the collection has been enlarged. We owe to the initiative of Sir Sidney Colvin, in the first instance, the formation of the finest nucleus of Asiatic painting in Europe; the series of Japanese kakemonos is famous, and with the recent acquisition of an important section of the Wegener Collection, the Chinese department, already rich, has become richer. It is with the art of China that this article is concerned, for it would be impossible in the space at my disposal to include Japanese pictures,

which cover some eight centuries of development. Too much is known of Japan, too little of China. Even to Asiatic experts the art of the Chinese is like a book from which countless pages have been torn. Some of the pages are perhaps to-day in the British Museum.

Who has not heard of the immemorial culture of China? Yet Monsieur Reinach does not hesitate to ascribe the finest development of her arts to a period contemporary with the mediæval ages in Europe. Is this the case? As far as painting is concerned his contention is substantially correct. If to-day a Chinaman's ancestors are ennobled with him—China has for ever ennobled her past, ascribing to mere beginnings those qualities that astonished the early Greeks in the sculptures by Diadalos, or which Homer gave to the 'automata' in the house of Antinoos—we must not take the rumour of past excellence for a fact, least of all in China.

The character and beauty of the Chinese bronzes, executed before our era, remained an example to be imitated by later craftsmen; we know nothing of her earliest painting. The

carvings in Shantung tombs date from 130 A.D.: they prove the existence of a native art, unrelated to that of Persia or India, which may well have had a counterpart in a primitive school of painting; but of this no trace is left. More than two centuries later, when Greco-Roman art had not yet fused with Syrian elements and become Byzantine, China praised the idealism and subtlety of the work of a great artist named Kakuaichi, one of whose recorded paintings is to-day on view in the British Museum (No. 1). This has been admirably described by Mr. Binyon in his *Painting in the Far East*, who notes its essentially Chinese character and the total absence of any Hindu influence. In his own time Kakuaichi was the first in art, in poetry and in folly, and there is a blitheness, a latent humour, and a sly delicacy in his painting which is far from suggesting the strenuous beginning of an art. He is as far removed, in his sense of form, from the 'dumpy' figures of the Hang sculptures as he is free from the flamboyant style of early India. His manner is still fettered by a strong convention—what art is not ?—but

he carries it lightly. If one might venture on one of those facile conclusions so dear to critics, one would say outright that his work reveals a latent realism which will underlie the finest subsequent Chinese paintings, despite its self-imposed limitations and aims—a realism which a Japanese would ascribe to something materialistic at the heart of a race which, for centuries, has thought itself weary in the pursuit of wisdom.

The interesting fragments of Buddhist paintings from Turkestan belong mainly to the eighth century. The art is a provincial one—a local development—more Indian than Chinese, and probably earlier in spirit than in date. One fragment, however (No. 2), shows considerable artistic merit, and may illustrate the Tâng style in religious painting.

To-day, even, the Tâng period is famous for its culture. Two precious specimens of its painting are on view; both are ascribed to a master, Han Kan, who worked in the eighth century. Both specimens are in every sense typical of what Chinese painting will become; they might be placed many centuries later

and cause no surprise. One of these rare works represents a charger, and this artist was famous for his rendering of them; but even the early Tomb sculptures exhibit a keen sense of the carriage of the head, the massive haunches of the horse. From the first, Chinese art would seem to have recalled the ancestral indebtedness to the horse, before the ox and the plough had turned the nomadic Chinese Tartar into the agricultural Chinaman. Han Kan's painting can stand the comparison with the superb design of two 'Tethered Chargers,' ascribed to Chao Meng Fu (No. 35); between these specimen works, or, indeed, between those which preceded them or which will follow, lie centuries of recorded effort of which no trace is present here to confirm one in the knowledge of the 'when and where' this thing or that was first achieved. Travellers in China speak of vast bridges spanning small country streams, of highways that cease in desert places. When tracing the course of Chinese art, as it is known to us, the student becomes lost in bypaths —the river has flown away from the bridge, and the promised palace at the end of the goal

beyond has vanished beneath the dust of modern China ; perhaps it was never built, but only contemplated by those ancestors who rule the world in the Far East with so long and so strong a hand.

The Sung period saw established or expressed in compact technical formulas all that China had till then striven for in her arts : but, whilst accepting this statement largely on trust, do not let us underestimate the later Mongol work which is a continuation of its traditions, nor dismiss the early Ming period, which has so far stood supreme in the admiration of Europe, mainly owing to the ornate objects of the eighteenth century, with which it had nothing to do. There is a troublesome tendency for Sung masterpieces to be recognised as Ming by Oriental experts.

To the Sung epoch is ascribed a superb monochrome of wild ducks, and a still finer painting of two geese (No. 30), dating from the eleventh century. Could anything seem less promising than the subject of this work ? Yet the sense for mass which ennobles some carved beasts, wrought by the most cunning Egyptians, is

here recalled, together with a dim recollection of the lowing steer on the frieze of the Parthenon. Perhaps an explanation will be found when we realise that the nobility of the work is the result of something temperamental in the artist. Taste and the sense for style are not enough. There is a way of perceiving things which accounts for our pleasure in, shall we say, a dwarf by Velazquez, or in a drawing of a wild hog by Pisanello. No masterpiece has yet been painted by a fool; possibly no great man can see things meanly. This work is equalled, not surpassed, by some four or five rare pieces only in the white wing collection: foremost among these I would place No. 34, representing 'Three Rishi in a Mountain Haunt,' which dates from the fourteenth century. Here most of the qualities common to the finest Chinese painting would seem to meet and become fused; the workmanship has force and reticence, and both qualities are illustrated by the rich and sober colour. The artist's sense for characterisation recalls the grandeur which Signorelli imparts to his prophets and warriors. One thinks also of those superb

early tempera pictures on linen by Albert Dürer—the two wings at Dresden, for instance. The same art with less delicacy belongs to two other paintings of 'Rishi' (Nos. 45 and 46) that belong to the same great period of Chinese achievement. I have already spoken of the 'Tethered Horses' by Chao Meng Fu; to this famous master is ascribed the designing of a superb landscape touched by dim traces of snow (No. 36). Chao Meng Fu was painter to the great Kublai Khan, and Marco Polo may have admired these very works among the many wonders he saw in the richly-painted palaces of the 'Lord of Lords,' who was 'the most powerful in people, in lands and in treasure, that ever was, from the creation of Adam to the present day.' The same robust sense of character and rugged dignity is present in a painting representing a Tartar shooting pigeons (No. 66), which dates from the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Down to the close of the seventeenth there is a recurrence of these manly qualities, and a kind of 'ideal' impressionism which had belonged to the Sung and Mongolian epochs.

To the fifteenth century are ascribed several monochrome pictures, to the seventeenth the 'Bear and Eagle' (No. 58), which might be a masterpiece by the Japanese master Sotan. An element of nobility still survives in the loose workmanship of the 'Demon Queller' (No. 107), with which the nobler series of Chinese painting is brought to a close.

To the expression of strength the Chinese painter could add a rare feeling for delicacy. This is achieved in a lovely painting of 'Phœnixes and Flowers' (No. 59), which belongs to the early Ming period.

So far I have said nothing of the flower pictures made by a people who are rivalled in their love of Nature by one other only, namely, the Japanese. Let us, therefore, admire the 'Peonies' (No. 33), the 'Mallows' (No. 42), and, above all, a rich and imposing painting of birds and blossoming trees ascribed to Lu Chi, to whose hand is also given two other works of a more ordinary type.

China has ever chosen flowers as a welcome subject for her art. To her their tremulous life, their fragility and beauty, was enough

to conjure up the moods of the seasons : spring with her waywardness and promises ; the ease and richness of summer ; and autumn, when spring flowers sometimes return. Europe has painted flowers as accessories or ornaments in pictures—the gennet and columbine peep out of the frame of Gentile's 'Adoration of the Magi' ; Fra Angelico threaded roses like beads upon a string, and saw stars and gleams upon the grass ; Botticelli invented them and Leonardo drew them. To Titian, who loved violets, or Velazquez, who once painted his impression of the iris, rose and marigold, they might figure in the corners of pictures or be passed from hand to hand. The professed Dutch and French flower-painters of the seventeenth century constructed their botanical specimens in porcelain or zinc, with something of the feeling still to be found in the faded wax camellias and fuchsias that were made by the listless hands of our Victorian grandmothers. The wish to bring the spectator within the spell of the charmed life of a flower belongs only to the painters of China and Japan : the better part of the later paint-

ings of the eighteenth century illustrate this Eastern passion.

There remain several pictures of strange dimpled and bird-like little women toying with flowers, who were painted so often on the tea-cups and plates sent to Europe to be admired by the rich collector and dealer. No. 87 represents a fairy holding a branch of camellia. She would seem a Chinese Red Riding Hood, or perhaps her fairy godmother; she has just eaten the wolf.

I am probably mistaken in considering the life-size portrait of a seated princess (No. 64), which is one of the most delightful works of the exhibition, a painting of the eighteenth century; to me she seems the more stately sister of the 'flower maidens' who in other later pictures strew roses upon the ground to compel the spring to come, or who are about to visit the booths of the porcelain painter, who will paint them on the vases, which he will date three centuries backward out of compliment to these little ladies, who are worthy 'to move upon the jade pavements of the paradise of the ancient West.' All trace of

the finer qualities one admires in the Sung, Mongol and early Ming pictures has disappeared. It is for this reason that I have kept to the last a masterpiece (No. 81) which represents a sage; his face has grown old with thought and beautiful remembrances; the eyes are wan like the eyes of one who faces vast distances under the splendour of a great light. I do not know the date of the work; it has the calm of those things in art which one loves for the longest while. It is pale in colour, hardly more than a stain upon the silk, or the shadow of smoke upon a glass. It has the dimness of a cloud about to disappear. It stands alone among the paintings that surround it, in a sense of remoteness from all common things, and in a certain strange delicacy wherein thought, art and emotion have each an equal share and yet are one. This work alone should make the visit to the Chinese pictures in the British Museum more than the satisfaction of an insular curiosity or a 'new novelty' for the moment.

This article is lacking in generalities upon the many schools which have flourished in

China, in a definition of northern and southern tendencies; but Asiatic experts do not always agree upon this subject. I have merely praised each individual work as it struck me, just as a child might praise the figures in a picture-book. In the fragmentary condition of our knowledge little more can be done. That China and Japan should have sought for movement where Europe sought for construction; that Asiatic art should prize symbolism where we value verisimilitude, counts for nothing in the result: each of these qualities is necessary in some degree in all admirable painting. It is the player himself, not the rules of the game, who delights us. Success or perfect good luck are integral elements in the composition of all genius: the rest is of the spirit, and knows no place.

XV

THREE ESSAYS ON ORIENTAL PAINTING

THREE ESSAYS ON ORIENTAL PAINTING

Three Essays on Oriental Painting. By Sei-Ichi Taki. Bernard Quaritch.

TO most art lovers there will be nothing surprising in the statement that of all modern nations Japan is the proudest of her past. No other country is more conscious that art is the most enduring portion of a nation's history, that it is the evidence of its nobility and the pledge of future greatness. This admiration has found expression in an unrivalled series of publications, due to public and private enterprise, in which the origins of architecture, sculpture and painting have been traced from the time when Japan still built little thatched huts for her dead, in the silence of a land in the clasp of primæval forests, to the period when, at the touch of Indian thought, she strove to express man's sense

of immortality, which is at the root of all art; and with the clay of the modeller, the brush of the visionary, a school arose which has continued to flourish for more than a thousand years. This continuous effort has wavered in its success only with the fortunes of the race; it has lived on with the persistence of a plant that cannot die though it be bruised, cut down, or torn at the moment of its fruit.

Foremost among the ventures which have made known to us in Europe the masterpieces of Japanese painting must be ranked the Kokka, and the idea was a lucky one to publish in an inexpensive form a selection of master-works, together with three essays, by its editor, Mr. Sei-Ichi Taki. This book affords not indeed a complete historical account of the Japanese school, but a concise and singularly unpretentious summary of some of its more notable phases, together with a chapter upon Chinese painting, the influence of which upon Japan may be likened to that of Italy upon France. There are many reasons which give value to this book; it is therefore in no carping spirit or with the wish to plume borrowed feathers

that I would point out that the latest and most exacting phase of Japanese criticism rejects the authenticity of some works which Mr. Sei-Ichi Taki has accepted : that Keion, for instance, has been pronounced a mythical name, and the authorship of the famous Toba Sojo scroll dismissed. The author also leaves practically unillustrated the great school of religious painting, but—I mention these shortcomings not to discount the genuine value of the book—I am probably merely moved by that instinct which makes all critics ask for that which the author has not chosen to give. Let me hasten to say that the accuracy of traditional ascription concerning works which, in the waste of time, have become unique or almost unique, is of small importance ; the superb early frescoes at Assisi, for instance, remain, even if we are not certain that Cimabue was their author, and it is in the handling of familiar questions concerning Japanese painting that this book gives most pleasure. This is as it should be. Mr. Sei-Ichi Taki has given great prominence to the continuity of the Yamato Tosa school, which remained, on the whole, independent

of direct Chinese influence. He also indicates the not always fortunate interchange between these two traditions, *i.e.* the Chinese and the Yamato or Japanese school. If, like all his countrymen, he bows to the fame of the Japanese interpreters of Chinese methods, he insists upon the native sense for colour. To this great quality I would add the stronger sense of design possessed by such Japanese masters as Yetoku and Korin, in whose masterpieces nothing essentially Chinese remains, and with whom, to me at least, Japan has endowed the world with triumphs of decorative painting for which we have no parallel elsewhere.

It is a pleasure to find so frank an approval of the great decorators Yetoku and Korin without those reservations which I have sometimes divined in the Japanese estimate of the artists who flourished under the Tokogawa régime. It is also refreshing to find Hokusai and even Hiroshige given a place in the art hierarchy of their country at a time when some Europeans tend to underrate them in their wish to appreciate the vanished work of legendary masters. If in Japan the admiration of the past is some-

times over-influenced by an element of ceremony, by precedence in date, and by the charm of distance, it is late in the day for a European to consider himself wholly innocent of similar tendencies. Let me add that Mr. Sei-Ichi Taki is singularly free from this form of cant, that he considers the spiritual import or the richness of purpose alone as essential to a masterpiece, not merely its age or fashion, though both may have a relative interest of their own.

The book opens with a quotation from Ruskin, 'Painting is nothing but a noble and expressive language,' and Pope has said, 'The pencil speaks the tongue of every land.' Both statements go a long way to explain the use and the magic of the arts which makes a Japanese brush sketch, done perhaps five or six hundred years ago, a thing as fresh and stimulating as a line by Wordsworth. Mr. Sei-Ichi Taki lays great insistence upon the idealistic element in Japanese art, which its European admirers do not always seem to have valued at its worth, and the entire part of these essays devoted to Japan is convinc-

ing and charming. The portion of his book devoted to Chinese painting is less so. We feel the difficulty of the subject in the discussion of schools which are no longer distinct, and the tendency of the older nation, with her immemorial civilisation, to revert continually to some obscure and now lost precedent, for China seems ever ready to sink back into a tittering omniscience, and I suspect her strongly of telling fibs about her age. These difficulties have affected the author, though he belongs to the nation from whom we may expect our first knowledge of China. Some recent writing by Dr. Kummel would hint that our only hope is in Berlin, and that Chinese art is to be made in Germany ; but so far, alas ! China has kept her secret, if indeed there is one to keep. Of Japanese painting it is different, and on this delightful subject we are glad of Mr. Sei-Ichi Taki's assistance.

XV

OUTAMARO

OUTAMARO

THE art of Japan has made no lasting impression upon England; in France a similar error has been averted by the effort of a few artists and men of letters. It is to them we owe the discovery of Japan. I do not refer here to the influence of Japan upon some artists and upon the decorative arts—this has not always been fortunate—I refer to the effort to understand and write about Japanese art in a spirit of conciliation, and with the sense of its value to us and our culture. If at the present there are serious gaps in our knowledge, if much that passes current in criticism to-day will be set aside to-morrow, French research has at least brought us to the understanding of the later realistic school of Japan.

It is now more than thirty years since some coloured prints, rich and rare in tone,

excited the attention of a few—among them Edmond de Goncourt. We owe to him the picture of Outamaro, in a monograph that places all subsequent admirers in the writer's debt, and from which only generalities and minor inaccuracies may be removed by subsequent research. M. de Goncourt has been the first to shadow forth this rare artistic personality, which is at once definite and elusive, limited in scope but wholly exquisite, for the qualities of Outamaro will stand the test of various manners of approach, and the exercise of his peculiar gift of fascination has forced itself upon the attention even of those who had entered upon the study of Japan under the spell of the fantastic realism of Hokusai.

We would place Outamaro in a phase of art which is at once perfect yet dangerous to the future of its school; in a phase where, as with Botticelli, the artistic impulse has refined upon itself, but shows also certain signs of fatigue, not as with the Italian from callousness or haste even, but owing to a tendency towards monotonous trains of thought.

In Europe the art of Schöngauer with its

over-sweetness, of Zasinger with its delicacy, would hardly prepare us for the might and passion of Albert Dürer, whose art was influenced by them both. So the art of Outamaro does not prepare us for the advent of a Hokusai ; compared to him, he will seem at once a primitive and decadent, but, like Botticelli or Memling, the art of Outamaro escapes into charmed spaces, and divines much which those who came before or after him did not divine. A feeling that, with this Japanese, a monotonous and even feminine bent of mind mars an infinite refinement in form and colour, may lead many to suspect him, and with him the whole eighteenth-century art of Japan. He comes at the end of an epoch, exhausts its subject matter and accumulated experience.

I take it that a certain impatience is now manifest among art lovers towards the later trade-primitives of Italy, whose hold upon men of the last generation was excusable in the light of discovery and surprise. I do not think, however, that the bankruptcy in the delicate tradition of eighteenth-century art of Japan is entirely comparable to the break

in the great Tuscan school after the death of Piero della Francesca—a Tuscan by temper. In Japan in the eighteenth century the colour and technical side of art was refined upon; we may add that this refinement became subsequently a burden, whilst the impeachment of some Tuscan art of the later part of the fifteenth century implies a technical collapse. We have to pass from Piero della Francesca to Leonardo for an equal effort in technical discovery; even the noble art of Mantagna and the great savage force of Luca Signorelli seem contemporary with that of Paolo Uccello, and to contain efforts and experiments that Donatello and Desiderio had solved successfully. In Japan, one of the three art centres whose tradition may be viewed in its entirety, the art lover will accept at its proper value this over-refined phase of its art developed by Outamaro, in which the love of women has absorbed all other attention and will accept it for what it is.

It is the mere accidents of a tradition which makes of Outamaro an important master of the modern school, 'the school of life,' and a pioneer

in revolt against the conventions of older moribund academies, in a revolution that may be said to culminate in the works of the great Hokusai. This definition, if commonly accepted, is to some extent inaccurate. I would urge that his unique prominence in an epoch of change has alone numbered him among the realistic masters. To aims of his own he added some interests common to the later realistic schools, but did they not borrow from him in their earlier works? The spirit in which Outamaro designed has affinities with aristocratic and æsthetic conditions; I think he shows this mental bent far more than did his immediate forerunners or older contemporaries with whom the realistic movement is latent.

By the excursions of an exquisite fancy he extended or transformed the subject-matter of his forbears, who treated by preference scenes in the everyday life of ordinary people, scenes noticed by the aristocratic Tosas only in the background of a court procession. As with the earlier eighteenth-century masters, he retained the Tosa convention of a clear,

clean outline, a recollection of their aristocratic interiors, and a love for colour and dress. In method the old Tosa school was an offshoot of the miniaturist art come from India, through China, with the Buddhist religion. We will find traces of Indian formulas transformed, it is true, but opposed to the calligraphic influences of China, and, at this moment, one is seized with a sense of hallucination; the half-revealed whiteness of an apparition passes across one's eyes beyond the perspective of sanctuaries, as we remember that touch of Hellenic sweetness in the art of Indian Buddhism, carried with it into the farthest East, not dead at all but altered, putting a trace of some remote European manner into this later phase of Japanese art.

Whatever may be the many influences upon the work of Outamaro, his colour harmonies fulfil his own needs: to the subject-matter of his immediate forerunners he has brought a gift of analysis, an element of the strange, the exquisite, that mere nothing making for grace. His name conjures up the vision of shapes that have the curve of fountains and

of cloud-like colours. His is a world that is remote yet actual; he has shed over all that loveliness of faded things, the troubled hues of a fresco about to disappear, of a flower dying in the twilight.

With Outamaro the attention given to an act, a movement all bright, all gay, or trivial, has acquired by the strange subtleties of his temper a seriousness, a hint of sadness even, that will class him among a few rare poetic painters. Unlike Hokusai, dramatic effect and variety of character lay beyond his aim. He was proud of his achievement as the mere painter of the spring, the painter, the portrait-painter of fair women. At home he was and is still despised as the artist for the tea-houses, a minister to those frivolous needs of women, to whom he brought the new things of fashion and the ways in dress. He has treated tragic episodes of legend and drama as if acknowledging his limitation, wherein the whole action has been given over to women, wherein a haunting sense culminates in the dramatic opposition of an unique black dress to the folds of fairer dresses, or by the presence of a naked

sword, thus implying an end beyond the motions of his actresses. A change of temper breaks through the constant preoccupation to charm. Sometimes the urging of other dormant energies pushes him to the erotic, but even here he will use majestic lines and chosen colours. We may well marvel at a train of thought so strange to the more downright ways of Europe; yet we may be mistaken to wonder overmuch, for an artist grasps at hints, giving variety to the aspects of his work in indifference to the probable effect upon those who would appraise his limitations or view him with hostility. Such moods remain not too distinct to the artist himself, for in the exercise of the imaginative faculties, thoughts will take motion as it were from freshets of strange winds, blown from quarters remote. And there is danger in the censure of such 'digressions'; they will be found not to answer to the requirements in the health of an exceptional state. With Outamaro, whose mind was without anxiety or trouble, something of shadow may become noticeable at times, for half the passions of life and the terrible-

ness of things make their appeal through the eyes to the mind. Let me repeat: his nature leant out towards the fairer aspects of life; it was untroubled by choice, by any emotion outside a world that lived very close to the flowers, in an immunity from anxiety and under conditions we can hardly imagine here and now.

Outamaro died having loved too well. He was a great lover of women, hence curious intuitions—half-feminine intuitions—often present in men of his stamp. Natures like his are not averse to the sight of maternity, and in his rendering of women ministering to the little wants of their children, he retains a charm denied to the more grave Italian painters of the Madonna.

His printed works are numerous. During his lifetime he enjoyed a great reputation that penetrated even to China; and print after print reveals his quest after delicate line and rare colour harmonies. He will select from the fleeting graces of a game, or from the motions of reverie alike; all this he will clothe with the tints of early flowers and of faded

leaves; his mere paper will be mottled with traces of colour that has been removed, or glazed with a frosted substance like faded silver. He possesses to the full the resources of a colourist who is always sensitive in the matter of surfaces—the colourist of a country that has several names for white. A common characteristic in his work is the love of mirrors, and of reflections in water used to repeat or introduce an element of interest. In his compositions he will often affect the half-drowned appearance of things bathed in water or behind a gauze, as in the two magnificent triptychs, 'Les Plongeuses' and 'Les Porteuses de Sel,' veiling the limbs of his women in the twilight of a wave; or, by means of spangled and translucent materials, become playthings in the hands of women, as in one of those magnificent prints where a woman passes a veil across her mouth and eyes, or in which a mother peeps at a child from behind a scarf. With him the transparent green of mosquito-nets is used to half conceal the whiteness of a face, or to make emerge from the shadow a hand or arm with the effect of some flower rising from the water.

As a colourist he works in a key that rests in a range of tones unknown to the art of Europe. We may admit that time and use have dimmed the stronger oppositions of blacks and yellows, violets and crimsons, or the vivid crossings of white used to freshen any languor of effect, and have given an added subtlety that cannot be found in new colours or surfaces, making his effects more rare and his colour more grave: but this is but an added charm to that which was beautiful from the first.

There is often a great attractiveness about things once bright when thus dimmed by the handling of time; for this reason men have been found who, like Baudelaire, divined the interest in old faded fashion-plates, apart from any sententious interest to be drawn from them, as with our own Thackeray, who wore spectacles. The art of Tanagra passes as a fortunate addition to our enjoyment, brought about by things originally of slight importance, but found now to be exquisite indeed; to this world belong the prints by Outamaro.

For the moment he is little loved in England.

That I have dwelt upon the slightness of his aims may count against his work being treated seriously; but art in Japan often dwells close to every movement in life, a ministrant jealous of all possible exactness, yet without fear of the indifference of persons like ourselves, jaded to all but novelty. The cultured of his country are often light of heart, they dismiss the over-positive and the vague alike, but gracefully, for what it is—a glint of light, a waif of perfume. The all-absorbing, the gluttonous melancholy at the heart of the East, touches Japan but little; they are apt to be ironical about it, to pass it by in a verse or a simile with a gaiety that is foreign to us also, or at any rate to recognising it nobly, as the passion for the few. One of their greatest artists, Outamaro, has accepted these conditions, ministering exquisitely to the needs of an audience that to him was never dull and rarely tired. A great sense of perfection alone reveals that finer sadness from which all sense of perfection is seldom entirely free.

Among slight things of grace few will be found to equal the grace, the charm that is his. His

deftness of hand is not mere slightness of execution; his conventions retain a frank, swift sense of beauty. He meant no more than to *please*, but to please a people whose possibilities for the future had not ceased, and, with all his consciousness of means, he represents the subtlety, the complexity of an art tradition that had remained young, and for this reason the result will remain unforeseen and fresh to us.

The Dial, 1897.

XVII

THE ART OF STAGE DECORATION

THE ART OF STAGE DECORATION

To G. Bernard Shaw.

I HAVE often met with the question: 'Is there an art of stage decoration?' Should the setting of plays be different, and if so, what should be the difference? This sense of dissatisfaction is in part felt; it is sometimes merely due to the hearsay of better things abroad.

Is there some guiding principle which would tend towards greater fitness and beauty in the stage setting of the poetic drama? There is no general panacea which is adequate to meet all contingencies, but many conditions which vary in their value; simplicity is one, but it should be a beautiful simplicity—and who has ever succeeded in defining the beautiful? I think the nearest definition of that which is needed will be found in the word 'con-

centration,' let whatever elements you have in hand be brought into order and focus by the subordination of unnecessary detail, or, better still, by emphasis where it is wanted; and these are qualities which an artist brings to the making of his pictures. There remain other elements besides which belong to the theatre, for if the stage can be described as a picture in motion, at times it may be little more than a bas-relief. The aim of the decorator must therefore vary with each play, no single method being equal to all contingencies; there is the need of brains in the producer, self-control, taste and imagination—the need of the right man: in fact, of the artist.

The production of our poetic drama usually fails in the sense of 'concentration,' in taste, and in imagination. The lack of the first is a vice, the second a fault; the lack of the third is grave. It is the quality most needed; it is unfortunately the rarest. The two first qualities are in a sense acquirable; they should be indispensable.

Our modern sense of the division of labour has grown out of our habits, behind it is the

instinctive mistrust of all masterful, responsible and governing minds. This has affected our management of the stage, which reflects the inharmonious co-operation of many men and many conflicting interests. The labour of production has been increased by the accumulation of lavish and quite speculative habits of expenditure; by insincerity of aim, and a confusion of standards in some vague sense of what the public wants. But our theatres rarely aim at any sequent or convinced effort at beauty of stage decoration; it would be better to consider, not what is the rule to-day, but what might be to-morrow should the right man come at the right time and place. I would disclaim all power of dogmatic utterance upon the value of what I am about to describe; I shall merely turn to that which has been achieved, mainly abroad, and give my views on some possibilities which are based on my experience in the production of some eight plays.

It is generally admitted that the first man to divine what was at fault in the conditions of the theatre was Richard Wagner; at a time

when no attention was given to the subject, he devised a house where the entire audience had an equal chance to see and hear. His sense of all practical questions, such as the relation of the auditorium to the stage and its structural needs for action and illusion, have not been improved upon, and have remained a standard abroad. No single theatre in England has been affected by Wagner's steady artistic sense of the 'practical';[1] our theatres and stages are still built on the pattern of the candle-lit theatre of the eighteenth century, intended to contain boxes, the use of which has disappeared in our 'more moral' age. All our stages are ludicrously shallow; behind their imposing prosceniums they are so lacking in depth that the action has to be hampered by overcrowded scenery, which in its turn is too near the footlights for any illusion of beauty or reality to be possible. I am convinced

[1] This word 'practical' is habitually employed by business men and managers generally rich with a large past experience of failure; it denotes a vast reserve of suspicion and hesitation. The artist—even a poor one—has to foresee what he aims at and do it; he has to be practical in his art. I remember Mr. Whistler telling me, 'Why, if we artists had the time to go on the Stock Exchange, the business man would not have a chance!'

that, if scenery is to be retained, and I for one hope that it will, in duty to the actors and the designer of the setting, a greater space should be allowed, and the scenery should begin where it usually has to end, namely, twenty or twenty-five feet away from the proscenium. I might add this is the rule, not the exception, abroad.

Outside England the height of the stage where the scenery is 'flied,' the height of the lights overhead, have met with some attempt at a reasonable solution. Here both are placed at a level which renders necessary the invariable use of ludicrous objects known as 'sky borders,' which usually affect the appearance of dirty linen sheets on a clothes-line, and prevent the possibility of the background going out of sight into space. The presence of sky borders, where realism is aimed at, is so ludicrous that one wonders if realism can be achieved at all save in an interior built upon the stage—ceiling, doors, bow window and all, as is often done in our spirited modern comedies, of which we can say that if beauty is not aimed at, some sort of realistic likeli-

hood is achieved, the footlights and lighting being alone gravely at fault.

The ludicrous effect of a rigid proscenium of equal size given to, shall we say, a cathedral, or the sitting-room of a shoemaker, has been coped with at Bayreuth by the use of an expanding and contracting frame—at the suggestion of Sir Hubert Herkomer, I believe, to whom we owe several valuable mechanical improvements sometimes in use. I have seen the proscenium contracted with original effects both in height and breadth at a production of *King Lear* at the Haymarket.

But I am wandering from the subject of Wagner and the setting of his dramas. If his practical sense was admirable, his pictorial taste was less sure; in fact it was merely a further elaboration of the sham realism current in all opera houses of his time—it was at once literal, complex and trivial. In the very texture of his magnificent tone poems lies a tendency to over-explain, to underline unnecessarily, even to strain his medium by literal imitation; to the sound of a horse's hoofs he loved to add the real horse itself, and this

tendency affected his conception of stage setting. I would dismiss his huge claims upon the machinist for fire, water, dragons and solid palpable cataclysms; these are within the means of a careful engineer, and they are as old as Monteverde, Lully, Gluck, Mozart even; each in turn has wanted dragons, vanishing scenery, and fire upon the stage. All these tricks of the machinist have found an advocate in so sober a mind as La Bruyère.[1] They can and should be done properly. But Wagner loved in scenery the elaborate and the sham-real; if he gives us for once a finely planned palace of the Grail, we have the horror of the Garden of Klingsor, with its voluptuous scenic details that are in the taste of an 'Empire ballet,' or the palatial smoking-room of some cosmopolitan hotel, such as Shepherd's at Cairo—palms, Arab columns, etc. It is easy to find fault with all this, and his betinselled Rhine-maidens and Brünnhildes in gilded corsets,

[1] C'est prendre le change, et cultiver un mauvais goût que de dire, comme l'on fait, que la machine n'est qu'un amusement d'enfants et qui ne convient qu'aux marionnettes: elles augmente et embellit la fiction où elle jette encore le merveilleux. Il ne faut point de vols, ni de chars, ni de changements, aux Bérénices et à Pénélope: il en faut aux Opéras. . . .

and to forget that in his time stage setting and dress was that which it still is at Covent Garden to-day. I think Wagner had some dim sense that visually all was not well at Bayreuth. There is the story, told by Malwida von Meysenbug to M. Romain Rolland, that, as she was watching the *Ring* through her opera-glasses, two hands leant on her shoulder, and Wagner said : ' Do not look so much, but listen ! '

It can be said briefly that if Wagner's practical views of the theatre were revolutionary, he lacked the painter's sense of visualising his work beautifully ; that he merely utilised what was deemed excellent in his time, just as Dante accepted the contemporary scientific idea of things, with this difference, to me at least, Dante's view of astronomy is the only one I am able to understand, while I hate Wagner's taste in the plastic presentation of his dramas.

The reaction against the Bayreuth fashion in stage decoration has grown out of the imaginative appeal of the tone poems themselves. It is now thirteen years ago that

M. Adolphe Appia published a book, *Music and Stage Setting*,[1] in which a new move in the art of scenic interpretation is described. To this absorbing work must be attributed directly and by proxy the far-reaching and varied attempts at stage reform which have taken place in Germany and elsewhere.

M. Appia's theories might be briefly described as a discarding of all attempt at fussy realism or literalness of detail; to this he would add an enveloping effect of ever-changing light, accompanying and interpreting the action like the presence of the music itself. He would reduce all natural scenic forms to silhouettes of a broad and impressive aspect, not merely because their realistic rendering falls always short of truth and probability, but because these abstract forms have a beauty of their own which is imaginative in mood and therefore suitable to works of the imagination. The intelligent reader will foresee that in a building M. Appia will seize upon some feature,

[1] *Die Musik und die Inscenierung*, von Adolphe Appia (München: Brückmann). It is curious to note that M. Appia, a Frenchman, has written and published his book in a foreign tongue and place. Prophets are rarely prophets in their own country.

such as a cavern-like porch or a cluster of dim pillars; that his trees will be little more than trunks and broad masses of colour; that a rocky landscape will form into hill-like sweeps of tone with monolithic forms: and such is in truth his setting for *Tristan*, *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, and of Byron's *Manfred*. His ruling principle might be described as 'a simplification of the motives of scenery.' This should be broadly massed, since the actors complete the picture; over all the ever-moving mystery of light and shade should be thrown to heighten or reduce the sense of reality; all fussy over-lighting must be avoided, since this would reduce your 'non-realistic' scenery into mere canvas and paint, as we see it to-day in the pseudo-realistic settings of our melodramas and Shakespeare revivals.

The simplifying of the scenery, both in subject-matter and execution, opens up a large field of endeavour; the method can vary infinitely. M. Appia's abstract view of scene-painting is also boundless in the possibilities of individual interpretation; it may be austere, primæval, or even rich and fantastic, to suit

the mood of any play or the habitual preferences of any artist. The delightful stage settings of the Russians are the result of a decorative and very personal treatment of circumstances that are not abstract in themselves, as with M. Appia ; nor are they affected in any way by an original use of light. M. Bakst's enchanting stage decorations, for instance, are but the highly and very temperamental rehandling of conditions which are newer in result than in aim ; in their non-realism alone can they be said to belong to the new art of stage decoration. Their success depends upon the value of the artist himself, which makes me return to my contention there is *no* golden rule governing all, but only a deliberate use of certain conditions which depend upon the taste, judgment and right emphasis by the right man. The idea has been forcing itself upon me that there are as many possible styles of theatre decoration as there are plays, varying from the processional action of Marlowe's *Faust*, which could be acted against a tapestry, to the horizons and immensities required to stage *Macbeth* ; from *Fidelio*, which requires

almost nothing, to *Parsifal*, to which all known arts might contribute; from the architect to the jeweller; from the painter to the maker of artificial flowers, without counting the engineer and electrician — in fact, all the arts which Leonardo might have at his command were he yet alive.

Can all these moods of the poetic and lyric stage fall under the control of a few principles or rules? They can only in so far that their treatment remains 'non-realistic,' like the text itself, be the method used an insistence upon mass, line, tone, colour, detail, or even the use of light, which are never marshalled, focused or brought into interrelation by our English managers. We hear the word 'simplicity' used too often as a guiding principle; I am not sure that I have not used it too often myself. A beautiful setting should 'seem' simple when this is the character demanded by the play, not otherwise. Underlying the simplicity or complexity demanded by the progress or development of the piece, the artist must husband his resources, reveal or conceal detail, much as a composer marshals and controls

an orchestra, or a painter the composing elements of a picture.

I have already stated that some plays require almost nothing—a wall or curtain pierced by entrances and exits. This sufficed for the classical stage. Professor Reinhardt's staging of *Œdipus Rex* will illustrate this; *Sampson Agonistes* requires nothing more. The use of curtains could be developed from a rigid frontality of use, or a mere box-like form which has sufficed Mr. Craig at times, and take the form of a circular colonnade or colonnades, and become open to vistas or form labyrinths for the action. Their use could simulate the stalactite effects of caves, the gloom of forests and cathedral pillars, should the decorator have an architect's sense of line: nothing more would be required for *Pelléas et Mélisande*. I can imagine Poe's *Red Death* danced by the Russians before a series of coloured curtains that would rise and fall and sweep away during the action to the sound of the bell which at last ushers in the figure of Death. But there will be a need in other works for more complex forms of stage decoration, and with an intelligent

use of scenery, we have the opening up of the larger field required by romantic comedy, the lyric drama, and the more complicated forms of tragedy.

I think the Russian seasons have proved that quite conventionally planned scenery is capable of giving pleasure, without resembling the work of M. Appia or the sparse, rigid settings of Reinhardt, should the spirit presiding over its execution chance to be delightful and resourceful. M. Bakst's rich and composite talent has touched many sources of inspiration, his disregard of reality has a romantic quality, and he may be said to replace Nature by something rather like it which is altogether delightful. The field he has explored is that of 'fantastic decoration,' and this is as vast as fancy. His controlling habit or rule is mainly the avoidance of realistic shadows and relief, and a pitch of colour which would allow even the use of large spaces of gold and silver in the scenery, though he has not done so; and this rule might apply to countless other styles other than his own. I wonder if I shall be out of place in recording a scheme

which twenty years ago might have counted as an innovation in the merely decorative treatment of the stage? At the request of Oscar Wilde, I sketched out a plan for *Salome*, which at that time had a chance of being given in Paris, that is, before Madame Sarah Bernhardt thought of giving it in London. I do not remember if it was M. Lugné Poe who contemplated the production, but I rather fancy it was, since he produced the play some years later, when Wilde was in prison. Here is my scheme: I proposed a black floor—upon which Salome's white feet would show; this statement was meant to capture Wilde. The sky was to be a rich turquoise blue, cut across by the perpendicular fall of strips of gilt matting, which should not touch the ground, and so form a sort of aerial tent above the terrace. Did Wilde actually suggest the division of the actors into separate masses of colour, to-day the idea seems mine! His was the scheme, however, that the Jews should be in yellow, the Romans were to be in purple, the soldiery in bronze green, and John in white. Over the dress of Salome the discussions were end-

less: should she be black 'like the night'? silver 'like the moon'? or—here the suggestion is Wilde's—'green like a curious poisonous lizard'? I desired that the moonlight should fall upon the ground, the source not being seen; Wilde himself hugged the idea of some 'strange dim pattern in the sky.' Alas! he never lived to see *Salome*: when I staged it, after his death, it was for a small dramatic club which had to consult economy. I therefore placed dim cypress-like curtains against a star-lit sky; the players were clothed in every shade of blue, deepening into dark violet and green, the general harmony of blue on blue being relieved by the red lances of the soldiers, and—shall I confess it?—owing to my nervousness in directing the limelight-man, the moon shone but very fitfully, generally after it had been mentioned in the text, and never once upon the floor! I think this experience has made me suspicious of the possibilities of 'lighting effects.' Beyond all things I hate the false green, blue, red and violet lights beloved by managers. The red light should occur only through the trap in Mr. Bernard

Shaw's delightful *Don Juan in Hell*, when the statue says, 'Ah, this reminds me of old times!' I dislike the harsh searchlight effects with which Professor Reinhardt spoilt his fine and imaginatively staged *Œdipus Rex* and the *Miracle*; these should be confined to ironclads when scouring the German Ocean. But in this article I cannot discuss in full the intricate technicalities of lighting and the current abuse of footlights, and, if M. Appia has controlled the light to his purposes, he is to be congratulated. That the light should become focused on the action is desirable, if it does not revert to the crude methods of the transpontine melodrama; that it should, for instance, increase and diminish in volume, rise and fall with the emotions of Tristan, or that shadow should blot him out when he sinks in imagined death, might be effective, should the means be not too obtrusive. Many of M. Appia's other lighting effects are, I admit, finely imagined—the luminous rock in *Das Rheingold*, the drifting shadows of *Die Walküre*, the incandescent pillar in *Manfred*, for instance; others are merely in-

genious, such as the shadow cast by a trellis in the moonlight, blotting out the action of the second act of *Carmen*. Sensational lighting opens up a field to the sensational dunce, and might become more odious and distracting than the work of the hack scene-painter.[1]

To me a great deal depends on an imaginative insight into what is suitable in the initial choice of a background to the action, and my personal bias is all towards imaginative emphasis in the preliminary choice of scenic conditions. If 'a part is often better than the whole,' it is certainly so in scenery: a staircase alone may suggest more of the majesty of a building than an entire palace. Our managers do not flinch, however, before the entire side of the Colosseum upon a stage twenty feet high, or all the details of a large ship-deck upon a stage the size of a large drawing-room.

[1] M. Appia holds another theory which affects the stage management of the romantic dramas, such as Shakespeare's and Wagner's: this is the condemnation of our flat unbroken stage floors. He contends that a freer and more natural movement and delivery of rhythmic speech would follow with the more natural movement of the actors necessitated by a floor of varied surface and level, and I think that he is right. The flat stage is a makeshift like the footlights, and an economical survival from the eighteenth century.

As the curtain goes up a shattered tree or cromlech will prepare the spectator for the desolation of *Lear*. As the action grows in intensity, so should the imagination of the artist be at its intensest. *Macbeth* might fall in a solitude where a forest had once been swept away by fire ; but magical seas, fantastic rocks and trees are needed to give illusion to *The Tempest*. The degree of simplicity in treatment must vary with the needs of the action and the taste of the artist ; no formula or fashion suffices absolutely. There is no salvation in any one scheme, no rule save that one designer should control the entire production, from the scenery to the smallest property.

I have said that Greek tragedies require only the architectural background in which they were generally given, but not all. Nor was this absolutely the case even in Greek times ; the *Choephoroe* of Æschylus may require nothing more than a rigid palace front, but not so the *Eumenides*, with its moving scenery, change of place and dramatic chorus ; the *Antigone* requires but little, the *Œdipus at Colonnos* a great deal.

What is needed in England to save us from our sloppy staging of the poetic drama? I have said that it is the right man—the artist—but first of all there is the need of a theatre. Let us have an auditorium where all can see in comfort, as at Bayreuth; but above all, let us have a stage which allows of proper depth for the action, proper space for scenic effect, and some scheme of lighting that is not twenty years behind the times, and the control of this most difficult subject by a mind other than the limelight-man at thirty shillings a week. Is this too much? Alas! it is not enough; we should still lack that in which Germany is most fortunate: this is not art—there are but a few, if any, really notable artists in Germany; it is not even Professor Reinhardt, though he has energy, imagination, and genius of a kind. What is this need which stands beyond all others in importance? It is the need of a willing and responsive audience and Press, such as a football match is able to secure; one that will pay and watch the game. In this, Germany is splendid and beyond praise! The new German theatre has the compact

and convinced audience and Press such as we find in England only in lucrative music-halls and football finals. The difficulties of arrivals, the longing to depart in time for suppers or trains, is not the foremost thought of the German audience as it is here ; Germany is a land of men, England would seem a land of women devoted to social gyrations and to the thoughtless love of movement for its own sake.

At present, I admit, we seem to have no Press or public who values the poetic drama, or would need a proper and imaginative setting thereto. But ten years ago such an audience did not exist in Moscow ; to-day it does : possibly it might be ' evolved ' here with time.

Should the ' new theatre ' be built outside London ? should all ladies in society be forbidden, and women allowed only when deeply masked ? Is this last suggestion too radical ? All this opens up a vast field for discussion ; it might lead ultimately to the careful exclusion of the Press till the last day of the production. But these questions concern the material success, not the artistic character, of the future of the poetic stage.

XVIII

GUSTAVE MOREAU

GUSTAVE MOREAU

To Gordon Bottomley.

IT is necessary to separate some of Gustave Moreau's characteristics from the exaggerated admiration they have sometimes brought about. A dim recognition of his tendencies has been caught by the current of artistic opinion: they have root in that touch of *nostalgic* unrest we have, wrapped among our daily habits. In itself this is a spiritual leaven, which has force to push circumstances beyond their common scope in our craving for manna upon the alien sand; but, whatever finds self-expression or self-revelation in his work, has gathered there into some special thing, lifted out and beyond our common capacities; and the existence of so complete, so finished an art utterance amid the haste of to-day, becomes strange if one forgets for the moment how irresistible is all art growth, whatever may

be its everyday conditions; how separate its real achievement from contemporary opinion concerning it, this being merely a matter of accident. If an air of nostalgia and of pallor are characteristic of Moreau's work, modern art has nevertheless become gifted by his effort with a new element of beauty, or one that, in its degree, seems different from the older sense that was only enamoured of health. Artists like Moreau watch the past in perspective as it were, through an atmosphere coloured by the atoms of our many experiences and ways of thought—through a subtile apperception of our weakness also, become in turn a subject of interest in a half-longing return to another ideal, more youthful in its immunity from failure.

In a characteristic phrase Gautier once sketched this desire to possess the past with the added charm it now has for us; he ends with a mention of Flaubert as incurable in this matter, and Flaubert's correspondence teems with revealing touches evoked at the actual contact with facts meaningless to others, as mere loose rubble or dust of the past, but,

to his gift of divination, redolent of rare sensations, intense, even to the verge of awe; so that a stray aroma of balm from the rent in some sepulchre conjured up to him the shapes, the very passions of a world now lost, whose magic he felt as a reality, but with much besides of glamour, due to its remoteness from our own time.

This love of long-forgotten things, joined to Flaubert's admiration for Moreau's pictures, has led to obvious comparison between the two artists, though a slight pause in judgment might show how false all such comparisons must be. With Flaubert that haunting force was vivid to create the real light of a 'possible' past with each detail cast out into clearness; with the painter the case is different, for Gustave Moreau remains a lover of mythical half-lights, not yet lost in the encroaching night nor absorbed by the approach of day; of emotions in a morning twilight—when Cerberus, forgetting his chain, may wander beside dark pools, near ghostly reeds; for time has become suspended to the moment when neither ship nor god need yet be gone, and nothing is impor-

tunate in its reality. We are in a world of 'mid-distances,' bounded by low-breathing seas, with littoral towns against the sky; in a place where the passing of a bird seems sudden and memorable. Here are flowers; strings of strange crystals and corals for appeal to our visual touch, to forbid the conviction that all this may be but mirage; that his mystic creatures must soon vanish like the perfumes in the censers, and leave with us but a handful of aromatic dust—the dust of hair, dust of leaf, and the glimmer in the grey of dim things, like the tarnished coin among the faded ash of some old sepulchre. Thus all resemblance to Flaubert lies only in their love of things remote from us.

In a book of impressions (Certains) Monsieur Huysmans lays too great stress on the forced element of contrast in some designs Gustave Moreau executed in illustration of the *Fables of La Fontaine*. With him, for the sake of critical emphasis, much of the painter's work seems too paradoxical;—Huysmans's descriptions elsewhere of some of Moreau's pictures abound, it is true, with acuteness of feeling,

his estimate of the *Fables* has, however, over-influenced most later criticisms. Nevertheless, in justification of the critic, Gustave Moreau's consent to undertake the illustration of La Fontaine was curious, and in some degree unlucky, none of the fables suggesting a subject fitted to his great but entirely lyrical genius. La Fontaine's animals, under didactic conditions, lay outside the world of Moreau's vision ; not to seem purposeless, they had to be clothed with unreality and move in the flora and cloud of a new fairyland with which the fabulist had nothing to do. The number of these drawings alone became troublesome to the artist, and, despite the beauty of many, one turns with a sense of relief to other designs, where motives more congenial to the painter pleasured his vision and quickened his hand in the realising of those instants when the fury of an act has passed, or gathers into new purpose beneath skies flushed by an aftermath of sun, or in a hush of Nature that would seem expectant of some countersign pregnant for the future. It is against such a sky that an all-persuasive figure moves away with the head of Orpheus

between her hands.[1] In another work, Salome seems already conscious of the doom between her and the face whose nimbus grows in the declining daylight, as the dawn might grow on a blind when the lamp goes out; beyond the sky centres to a blood-like spot, half cloud, half garment of the executioner passing beyond, like a fearful messenger to God. It is a spot of blood like crimson, in the shape of a little cloud above the sea, that gives to the picture of 'Helen' an undercurrent of doom to which the actors in it are all indifferent. From the brow of a cliff that is the battlement of a town, Helen moves against the sky; broken colours, with a hint of blood, creep upward across her dress, which is decked with a succession of amulets and fronds; these twine and twist into frail leaves towards the chalice of a blossom she holds near her face, and below her, so grouped and so clasped together as to form part of the ramparts, are the bodies, with wan faces and faded hands, of those who, for her sake, have been won to Death; their mouths smile yet, for as their lips grew wreathed and their eyes

[1] 'La Tête d'Orphée,' Musée du Luxembourg.

profound, they have sunk into the arrested sleep of some Elysian place, in this hour plucked from out of time. Thus, flowers and leaves of laurel are still in their hands, or the swords whose edge was fashioned against themselves; and that silent brotherhood, this buttress to the house that must not stand, is clothed with wreaths and incense haze, as if about a mystic sacrifice for which nothing can be too good, nothing too fair. What touch of foreboding may linger here smoulders away in the cloud and horizon, for the artist does not tell if she, who found nothing but praise between the lips of man, and praise gazing from his eyes, is capable of happiness; if hand over hand she is about to leave this place whose nights and days have become bitter with the ache of love and grief; if this Immortal knows herself to be more than woman, and would exult could she know laughter or tears.

Moreau has shown Helen (in a small water-colour drawing, 'L'Enlèvement') under another aspect of imaginative actuality, but wrapped again in her separateness from blame. She leans softly against Paris, on the foppery of

whose Phrygian dress the artist has dwelt, making it a delicate setting to her half-nakedness; the chariot, drawn by willing horses, flies past a landscape of crags; the sky burns its passion out above the sea, becoming black, and, in the blue, among the rocks, the Dioscuri watch the scene to which they are accomplices. The workmanship of this enchanting work is rapid of hand in the pencilling of cloud and form, and in an afterthought, half poetic intuition, half sheer pleasure in colour, he has added a bird dipped in crimson as a stray envoy of Venus, accentuating by its aerial flight the buoyancy of line in the picture.

Literature, by gradual process of appeal to the imagination, through which it brings things about, may show any incident, implying its degree of import in a hundred ways, where the eye, called to view only the result in picture, might find mere facts. Take the sonnet by Ronsard, whose subject at first sight would appear almost pictorial, with its implied winter light, in which Helen, become old and wrinkled, muses sadly on her vanished beauty. Imagine it translated into painting with the splendour once

hers only dimly shadowed forth. How uncertain would be the dramatic effect! How should we know that once she had indeed been Helen? In an early phase of his art Rossetti has succeeded in painted narrative. He has cast together, under the light of an intense imagination, not only the incidents of some story interwoven with new poetic additions and suggestions, but the almost digressive element of personal predilections in circumstances and counter-incidents; shrinking from no complexity in his certainty of grasp in close-knit design. With Gustave Moreau the dramatic element is also realised, but under different conditions. His creatures would become troubled and shadowy indeed if brought face to face with real facts and passions; they would swoon upon themselves, called back by some faint Lethean murmur or portent. Reality is suggested only by a few fair things fostered in the shadow of palaces, ravines, and by dim rivers, where light, water and air have become resolved into the limpid colours of rare crystals. The evidence of separate life, of the *without*, so hotly insisted on by Rossetti, is reduced by Moreau to the

half-fascinated wheeling, the circular flight of a bird, fraught at times with great realistic point, as in the shrieking seamew that flashes across the fall of Sappho from the rocks. His choice is among things of pomp and ritual. In this and his partiality for certain colours will be found his greatest limitations; yet therein lies also a sense of voluptuous melancholy which is the whole secret of his fascination.

Among his pictures some will be found that are different in temper, impetuous in dramatic feeling—the 'Diomède dévoré par ses Chevaux,' for instance, in which the feet of the tortured man bend back with suffering, whilst his whole body is borne from the ground in a vehement gesture of cursing and by the onward rush of his horses; the 'Phaéton,' 'L'Hydre de Lerne,' 'Le Retour d'Ulysse,' the 'Sappho expirante.' But these are largely a reaction from too long a brooding in his charmed habitual mood, and they have a sense of nervous refinement, an implied languor in their rage, that groups them in his habitual world of enigmatic silences.

To-day accusations of plagiarism are broad-

cast against very ordinary performances even, lest, in the hurry, one man should fortunately escape. With this great artist none of these accusations is reconcilable to the authentic stamp of his personality, drifting as they do between Mantegna, Turner, Blake, or vaguely, the Italian masters. An influence of Chassériau has been put forward; an early picture, belonging, like the 'Jason et Médée,' to a period of transition, will largely account for this impression, since Moreau has inscribed it with a dedication to the memory of his friend.

It might be difficult to account for so many opinions concerning the genesis of his pictures did one not know the tendency in most people to discover vague resemblances through a lack of some genuine test to their impressions. To the unaccustomed passer, trailing his feet about a gallery of antiques, all remain alike. This casts an oblique light into much criticism that, before work fastidious in its expression, jealous of its point of view, will recognise the uniform stamp of refinement on imitation, and, till the word be found by others expressing our

indebtedness for this new knowledge, knows but the word 'plagiarism,' so smooth to the ears of indifference.

There are many unusual influences in the fabric of his work, influences of many moods and memories, playing on them, drawing expression where they strike in some delightful iridescence of tone and thought. None would resolve the beauty of a crystal into known gases, and art, unlike natural substances, besides its elements of composition, contains some of the divine initial force that brings it about, whose quality calls force to force. To experience the sense of fascination holding the artist at work, weaving positive time and emotion into it, must be the only way of enjoying art; it is certainly of no use to persons of languid acquired feelings, to whom all new effort remains objectionable and obscure. Yet the penetration of this obscurity is to find it enchanted with 'spirit eyes': this strangeness outside our immediate experience becomes a possession for to-morrow. In the wrack of the past ('that approximate eternity certainly ours') Gustave Moreau has plunged, to bring with

his return new things and new messages to us. One sentence of De Guérin's recalls to my mind not only this, his great gift, but, very curiously, the possible aspect of one of his pictures ; the lines describe a young fisherman whose body, for a moment swayed against the sky, plunges among the trouble of the waters, to return, his head radiant with wreaths.

Moreau has the gift of renewing our interest in old, outworn subjects and myths—'Moïse exposé sur le Nil,' 'La Naissance de Vénus,' 'David.' It would be difficult to imagine a more noble picture than this last, yet more *intimate*, despite all its hieratic splendour of detail. Each element adds to it, from the waning of the incense to the faded lily which David holds in guise of sceptre. The hush over all seems to express the very soul of the dying man. Above him a lamp burns whiter every instant ; the weight of a crown bends the royal head towards the hands whose grasp is loose ; against the marge of the ballustrade a bird sings. But, at the foot of the throne, nestling like a dove upon a shrine, is a visible spirit of God clothed in the androgynous

garments of the angels, his face has, with its awful joy, some hint of Christ at the age when He disputed with the doctors, and the fingers of this apparition pass across the harp, whose strings the king can no longer know.

Hantise is the word by which a recent critic has conveyed the secret note whose obsession haunts with so strange a sweetness the work of Gustave Moreau. And his art is verily possessed by that fantastic spirit of perfection that dwells in the centremost chamber of the past. It is as if he passed a sponge across the faded hues of some ancient picture, making it visible for the moment. He makes actual that which must be too frequently but the echo of a remote recollection ; he has translated into terms of painting that craving for better and more perfect things which is a part, the better part, of all art expression.

The Dial, 1893.

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